A DOG WITH A BAD NAME

BY

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AUTHOR OF
‘MY FRIEND SMITH, ‘THE FIFTH FORM AT ST. DOMINIC'S
‘ROGER INGLETON, MINOR’ ETC.

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A DOG WITH A BAD NAME

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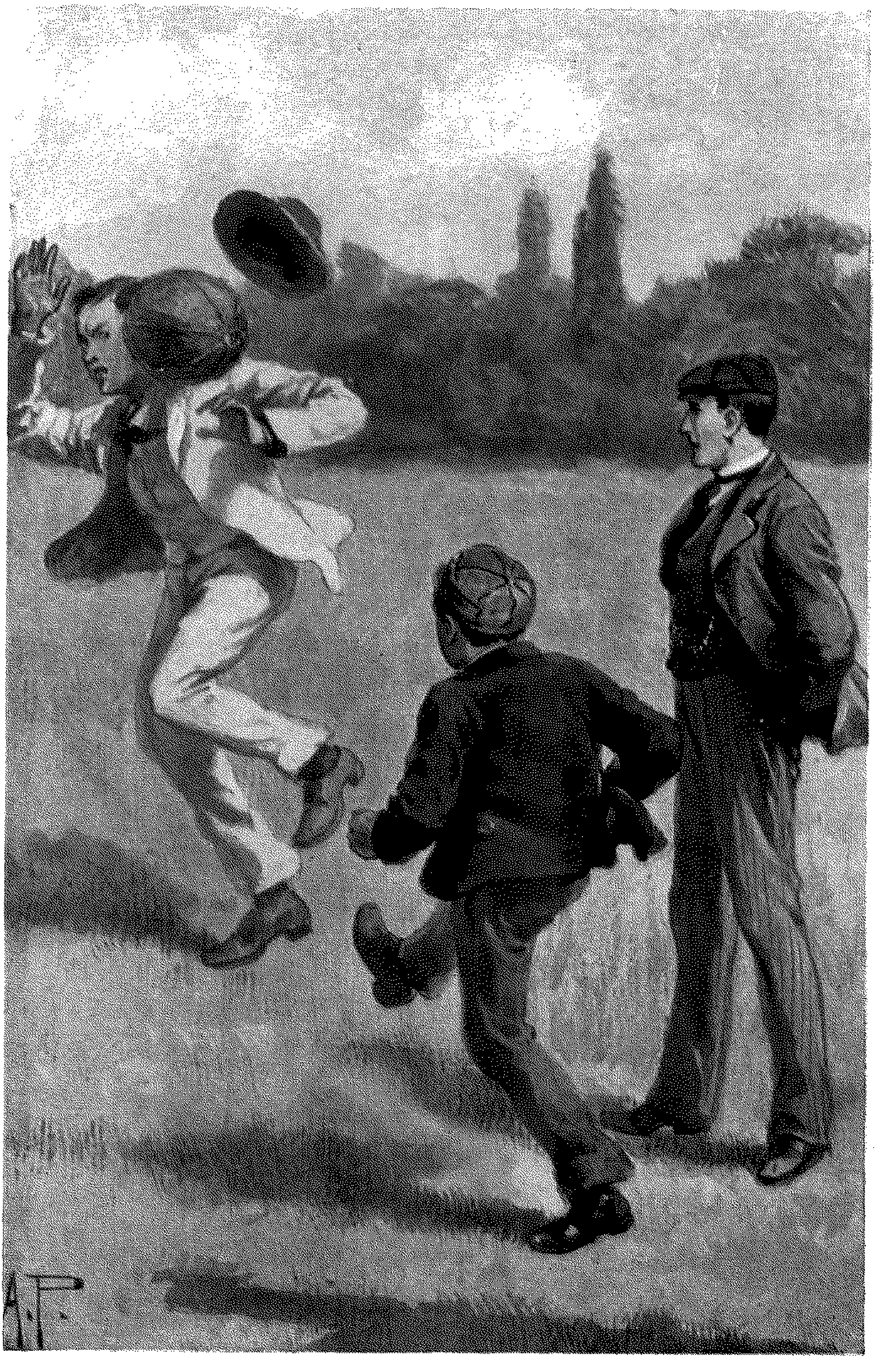

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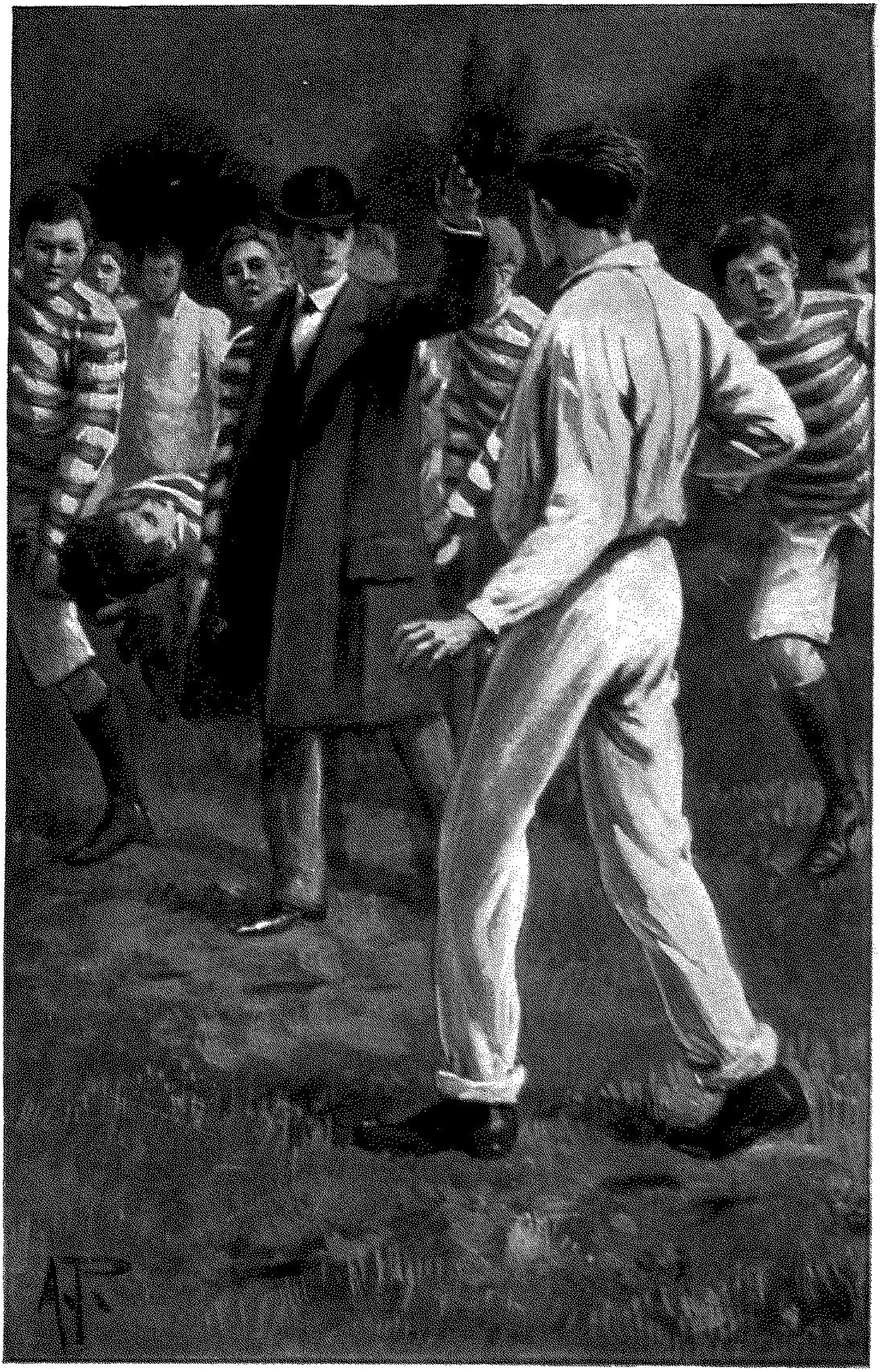
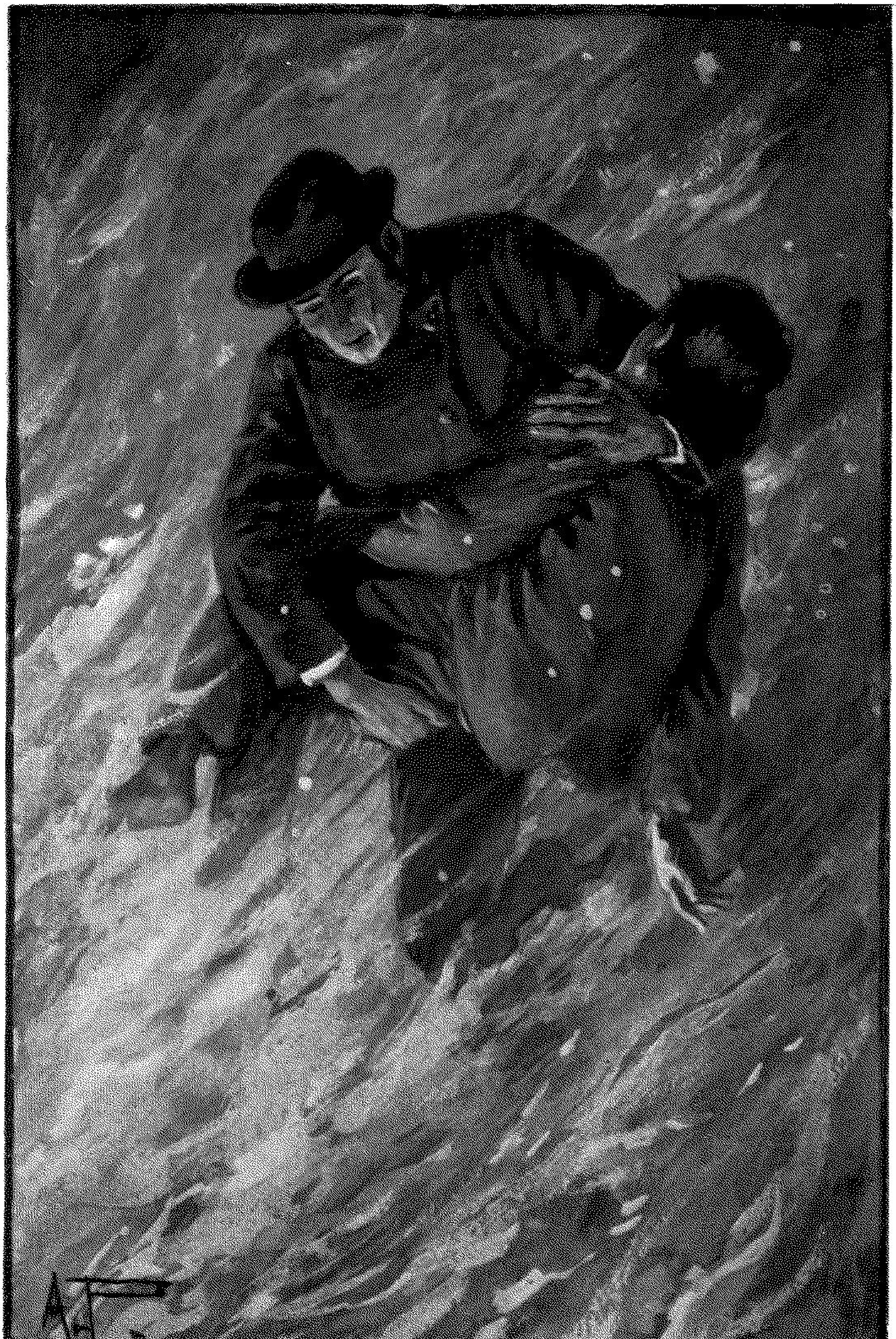


"STAND BACK, SIR! A JOLT LIKE THAT MAY BE FATAL."



HE HAD LITERALLY TO WADE THROUGH FLAME

A DOG WITH A BAD NAME

CHAPTER I

Dry-Rot

BOLSOVER COLLEGE was in a bad temper.

It often was; for as a rule it had little else to do; and what it had, was usually a less congenial occupation.

Bolsover, in fact, was a school which sadly needed two trifling reforms before it could be expected to do much good in the world. One was, that all its masters should be dismissed; the other was, that all its boys should be expelled. When these little changes had been effected there was every chance of turning the place into a creditable school; but not much chance otherwise.

For Bolsover College was afflicted with dry-rot. The mischief had begun not last term or the term before. Years ago it had begun to eat into the place, and every year it grew more incurable. Occasional efforts had been made to patch things up. A boy had been now and then expelled. A master had now and then "resigned." An old rule had now and then been enforced. A new rule was now and then instituted. But you can't patch up a dry-rot, and Bolsover crumbled more and more the oftener it was touched.

Years ago it had dropped out of the race with the other public schools. Its name had disappeared from the pass list of the University and Civil Service candidates. Scarcely a human being knew the name of its head-master; and no assistant master was ever known to make Bolsover a step-

ping-stone to pedagogic promotion. The athletic world knew nothing of a Bolsover Eleven or Fifteen; and, worse still, no Bolsover boy was ever found who was proud either of his school or of himself.

Somebody asks, why, if the place was in such a bad way, did parents continue to send their boys there, when they had all the public schools in England to choose from? To that the answer is very simple. Bolsover was cheap—horribly cheap!

"A high class public-school education," to quote the words of the prospectus, "with generous board and lodging, in a beautiful midland county, in a noble building with every modern advantage; gymnasium, cricketfield, and a full staff of professors and masters," for something under forty pounds a year, was a chance not to be snuffed at by an economical parent or guardian. And when to these attractions was promised "a strict attention to morals, and a supervision of wardrobes by an experienced matron," even the hearts of mothers went out towards the place.

After all, argues many an easy-going parent, a public-school education is a public-school education, whether dear Benjamin gets it at Eton, or Shrewsbury, or Bolsover. We cannot afford Eton or Shrewsbury, but we will make a pinch and send him to Bolsover, which sounds almost as good and may even be better.

So to Bolsover dear Benjamin goes, and becomes a public-school boy. In that "noble building" he does pretty much as he likes, and eats very much what he can. The "full staff of professors and masters" interfere very little with his liberty, and the "attention to morals" is never inconveniently obtruded. He goes home pale for the holidays and comes back paler each term. He scuffles about now and then in the playground and calls it athletics. He gets up Cæsar with a crib and Todhunter with a key, and calls it classics and mathematics. He loafs about with a toady and calls it friendship. In short, he catches the Bolsover dry-rot, and calls it a public-school training.

What is it makes Benjamin and his seventy-nine school-fellows (for Bolsover had its full number of eighty boys this term) in such a particularly ill-humour this grey October morning? Have his professors and masters gently hinted to him that he is expected to know his lessons next time he goes into class? Or has the experienced matron been over-doing her attention to his morals? Ask him. "What!" he says, "don't you know what the row is? It's enough to make anybody shirty. Frampton, this new head-master, you know, he's only been here a week or two, he's going to upset everything. I wish to goodness old Mullany had stuck on, cad as he was. He let us alone, but this beast Frampton's smashing the place up. What do you think?—you'd never guess, he's made a rule the fellows are all to tub every morning, whether they like it or not. What do you call that? I know I'll get my governor to make a row about it. It won't wash, I can tell you. What business has he to make us tub, eh, do you hear? That's only one thing. He came and jawed us in the big room this morning, and said he meant to make football compulsory! There! You needn't gape as if you thought I was gammoning. I'm not, I mean it. Football's to be compulsory. Every man Jack's got to play, whether he can or not. I call it brutal! The only thing is, it won't be done. The fellows will kick. I shall. I'm not going to play football to please a cad like Frampton, or any other cad!"

What Benjamin says is, for a wonder, the truth. A curious change had come over Bolsover since the end of last term. Old Mr. Mullany, good old fossil that he was, had resigned. The boys had heard casually of the event at the end of last term. But the old gentleman so seldom appeared in their midst, and when he did, so rarely made any show of authority, that the school had grown to look upon him as an inoffensive old fogey, whose movements made very little difference to anybody.

It was not till the holidays were over, and Mr. Frampton introduced himself as the new head-master, that Bolsover

awoke to the knowledge that a change had taken place. Mr. Frampton—he was not even a "Doctor" or a "Reverend," but was a young man with sandy whiskers, and a red tie—had a few ideas of his own on the subject of dry-rot. He evidently preferred ripping up entire floors to patching single planks, and he positively scared his colleagues and pupils by the way he set to work. He was young and enthusiastic, and was perhaps tempted to overdo things at first. When people are being reformed, they need a little breathing time now and then; but Mr. Frampton seemed to forget it.

He had barely been in his post a week when two of the under-masters resigned their posts. Undaunted he brought over two new men, who shared his own ideas, and installed them into the vacancies. Then three more of the old masters resigned; and three more new men took their places. Then the "experienced matron" resigned, and Mrs. Frampton took her place. No sooner was that done than the order went out that every boy should have a cold bath every morning, unless excused by the doctor. The school couldn't resign, so they sulked, and gasped in the unwelcome element, and coughed heartrendingly whenever they met the tyrant. The tyrant was insatiate. Before the school could recover from his first shock, the decree for compulsory football staggered it.

Compulsory football! Why, half the fellows in the school had never put their toes to a football in their lives, and those who had had rarely done more than punt the leather aimlessly about, when they felt in the humour to kick something, and nobody or nothing more convenient was at hand. But it was useless to represent this to Mr. Frampton.

"The sooner you begin to play the better," was his reply to all such objections.

But the old goal posts were broken, and the ball was flabby and nearly worn out.

"The new goals and ball are to arrive from London to-day."

But they had not got flannels or proper clothes to play in.

"They must get flannels. Every boy must have flannels, and meanwhile they must wear the oldest shirts and trousers they had."

Shirts and trousers! Then they weren't even to be allowed to wear coats and waistcoats this chilly weather! Hadn't they better wait till next week, till they could ask leave of their parents, and get their flannels and practise a bit?

"No. Between now and Saturday they would have two clear days to practise. On Saturday, the Sixth would play the School at three o'clock."

And Mr. Frampton, there being nothing more to say on this subject, went off to see what his next pleasant little surprise should be. Bolsover, meanwhile, snarled over the matter in ill-tempered conclaves in the playground.

"It's simple humbug," said Farfield, one of the Sixth. "I defy him to make me play if I don't choose."

"I shall stand with my hands in my pockets, and not move an inch," said another.

"I mean to sit down on the grass and have a nap," said a third.

"All very well," said a youngster, called Forrester; "if you can get all the other fellows to do the same. But if some of them play, it'll look as if you funked it."

"Who cares what it looks like?" said Farfield. "It will look like not being made to do what they've no right to make us do—that's all I care about."

"Well, I don't know," said Pridget, another of the Sixth; "if it came to the School licking us, I fancy I'd try to prevent that."

"And if it came to the Sixth licking us," said young Forrester, who was of the audacious order, "I fancy *I'd* try to put a stopper on that."

There was a smile at this, for the valiant junior was small for his age, and flimsily built. Smiles, however, were not the order of the day, and for the most part Bolsover brooded over her tribulations in sulky silence.

The boys had not much in common, and even a calamity

like the present failed to bring them together. The big boys mooned about and thought of their lost liberties, of the afternoons in the tuck-shop, of the yellow-backed novels under the trees, of the loafings down town, and wondered if they should ever be happy again. The little boys—some of them —wept secretly in corners, as they pictured themselves among the killed and wounded on the terrible football field. And as the sharp October wind cut across the playground, they shuddered, great and small, at the prospect of standing there on Saturday, without coats or waistcoats, and wondered if Frampton was designedly dooming them to premature graves.

A few, a very few, of the more sensible ones, tried to knock up a little practice game and prepare themselves for the terrible ordeal. Among these were two boys belonging to the group whose conversation the reader has already overheard.

One of them, young Forrester, has already been introduced. Junior as he was, he was a favourite all over Bolsover, for he was about the only boy in the school who was always in good spirits, and did not seem to be infected with the universal dry-rot of the place. He was a small, handsome boy, older indeed then he looked (for he was nearly fifteen), not particularly clever or particularly jocular. To look at him you would have thought him delicate, but there was nothing feeble in his manner. He looked you straight in the face with a pair of brown saucy eyes; he was ready to break his neck to oblige any one; and his pocket-money (fancy a Bolsover boy having pocket-money !) was common property. Altogether he was a phenomenon at Bolsover, and fellows took to him instinctively, as fellows often do take to one whose character and disposition are a contrast to their own. Besides this, young Forrester was neither a prig nor a toady, and devoted himself to no one in particular, so that everybody had the benefit of his good spirits, and enjoyed his pranks impartially.

The other boy, who appeared to be about eighteen or nineteen, was of a different kind. He, too, was a cut above the average Bolsoverian, for he was clever, and had a mind of his own. But he acted almost entirely on antipathies. He

disliked everybody, except, perhaps, young Forrester, and he found fault with everything. Scarfe—that was his name was a Sixth Form boy, who did the right thing because he disliked doing what everybody else did, which was usually the wrong. He disliked his schoolfellows, and therefore was not displeased with Mr. Frampton's reforms ; but he disliked Mr. Frampton and the new masters, and therefore hoped the school would resist their authority. As for what he himself should do, that would depend on which particular antipathy was uppermost when the time came.

Curiously enough, Bolsover by no means disliked Scarfe. They rather respected a fellow who had ideas of his own, when they themselves had so few ; and as each boy, as a rule, could sympathize with his dislike of everybody else, with one exception, he found plenty of adherents and not a few toadies.

Forrester was about the only boy he really did not dislike, because Forrester did not care twopence whether any one liked him or not, and he himself was quite fond of Scarfe.

"What do you think the fellows will do?" said the junior, after attempting for the sixth time to "drop" the ball over the goal without success.

"Why, obey, of course," said Scarfe scornfully.

"Shall you?"

"I suppose so."

"Why, I thought you were going to stick out."

"No doubt a lot of the fellows would like it if I did. They always like somebody else to do what they don't care to do themselves."

"Well, you and I'll be on different sides," said the youngster, making another vain attempt at the goal. "I'm sorry for you, my boy."

"So am I; I'd like to see the Sixth beaten. But there's not much chance of it if the kicking's left to you."

"I tell you what," said Forrester, ignoring the gibe. "I'm curious to know what Cad Jeffreys means to do. We're bound to have some fun if he's in it."

"Cad Jeffreys," said Scarfe, with a slight increase of scorn

in his face and voice, " will probably assist the School by playing for the Sixth."

Forrester laughed.

" I hear he nearly drowned himself in the bath the first day, and half scragged Shrimpton for grinning at him. If he gets on as well at football, Frampton will have something to answer for. Why, here he comes."

" Suppose you invite him to come and have a knock up with the ball," suggested the senior.

The figure shich approached the couple was one which, familiar as it was to Bolsover, would have struck a stranger as remarkable. A big youth, so disproportionately built as to appear almost deformed, till you noticed that his shoulders were unusually broad and his feet and hands unusually large. Whether from indolence or infirmity it was hard to say, his gait was shambling and awkward, and the strength that lurked in his big limbs and chest seemed to unsteady him as he floundered top-heavily across the play-ground. But his face was the most remarkable part about him. The forehead, which overhung his small, keen eyes, was large and wrinkled. His nose was flat, and his thick, restless lips seemed to be engaged in an endless struggle to compel a steadiness they never attained. It was an unattractive face, with little to redeem it from being hideous. The power in it seemed all to centre in its angry brow, and the softness in its restless mouth. The balance was bad, and the general impression forbidding. Jeffreys was nineteen, but looked older, for he had whiskers—an unpardonable sin in the eyes of Bolsover—and was even a little bald. His voice was deep and loud. A stranger would have mistaken him for an inferior master, or, judging from his shabby garments, a common gardener.

Those who knew him were in no danger of making that mistake. No boy was more generally hated. How he came by his name of Cad Jeffreys no one knew, except that no other name could possibly describe him. The small boys whispered to one another that once on a time he had murdered

his mother, or somebody. The curious discovered that he was a lineal descendant of Judge Jeffreys, of hanging celebrity. The seniors represented him as a cross between Nero and Caliban, and could not forgive him for being head classic.

The one thing fellows could appreciate in him was his temper. A child in arms, if he knew the way, could get a rise out of Cad Jeffreys, and in these dull times that was something to be thankful for.

Forrester was perhaps the most expert of Jeffreys' enemies. He worried the Cad not so much out of spite as because it amused him, and, like the nimble metador, he kept well out of reach of the bull all the time he was firing shots at him.

"Hullo, Jeff!" he called out, as the Cad approached. "Are you going to play in the match on Saturday?"

"No," said Jeffreys.

"You're not? Haven't you got any old clothes to play in?"

Jeffreys' brow darkened. He glanced down at his own shabby garments, and then at Scarfe's neat suit.

"I've got flannels," he said.

"Flannels! Why don't you play, then? Do you think you won't look well in flannels? He would, wouldn't he, Scarfe?"

"I don't see how he could look better than he does now," replied Scarfe, looking at the figure before him. Then noticing the black looks on his enemy's face, he added—

"Forrester and I were having a little practice at kicking, Jeff. You may as well join us, whether you play in the match or not."

"Why, are you going to play?" asked Jeffreys, not heeding the invitation. "Frampton has no right to make us do it."

"Why not? He's head-master. Besides, you can get a doctor's certificate if you like."

"No, I can't; I'm not ill."

"Then you'll have to play, of course. Everybody will,

and you'd better come and practise with us now. Do you know how to play ?"

"Of course I do," said Jeffreys, "I've played at home."

"All serene. Have a shot at the goal, then."

The Cad's experience of football at home must have been of a humble description, for his attempt at a kick now was a terrible fiasco. He missed the ball completely, and, losing his balance at the same time, fell heavily to the ground.

"Bravo!" cried Forrester, "I wish I'd learnt football at home; I couldn't do that to save my life."

"I slipped," said Jeffreys, rising slowly to his feet, and flushing crimson.

"Did you ?" said the irreverent youth. "I thought it was part of the play. Stand out of the way, though, while I take a shot."

Before, however, Jeffreys could step aside, a neat and, for a wonder, accurate drop kick from Forrester sent the ball violently against the side of the unwieldy senior's head, knocking off his hat and nearly precipitating him a second time to the earth.

The storm fairly burst now. As the fleet-footed junior darted past him the other struck out wildly; but missing his blow, he seized the ball and gave a furious kick in the direction of the retreating enemy.

It was a fine drop kick, and soared far over the head of its intended victim, straight between the goal posts, an undoubted and brilliant goal.

Forrester stopped his retreat to applaud, and Scarfe scornfully joined. "Awfully good," said he; "you certainly must play on Saturday. We've nobody can kick like that."

"I meant it to hit Forrester," said Jeffreys, panting with his effort, and his lips nearly white with excitement.

"Would you like another shot ?" called out the young gentleman in question.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, losing your temper like that," said Scarfe bitterly. "Couldn't you see he hit you by accident ?"

"He did it on purpose," said Jeffreys savagely.

"Nonsense. He was aiming at the goal and missed. You did the same thing yourself, only you aimed at him."

"I wish I had hit him!" growled Jeffreys, glaring first at Scarfe, than at Forrester, and finally shambling off the ground.

"There's a nice amiable lamb," said Forrester, as he watched the retreating figure. "I'm sometimes half ashamed to bait him, he does get into such tantrums. But it's awfully tempting."

"You'd better keep out of his way the rest of the day," said Scarfe.

"Oh, bless you, he'll have worked it off in half an hour. What do you bet I don't get him to do my Latin prose for me this afternoon?"

Forrester knew his man; and that afternoon, as if nothing had happened, the junior sat in the Cad's study, eating some of the Cad's bread and jam while the Cad wrote out the junior's exercise for him.

CHAPTER II

A Football Tragedy

THE two days' grace which Mr. Frampton had almost reluctantly allowed before putting into execution his new rule of compulsory athletics told very much in his favour.

Bolsover, after the first shock, grew used to the idea and even resigned. After all, it would be a variety, and things were precious dull as they were. As to making a rule of it, that was absurd, and Frampton could hardly be serious when he talked of doing so. But on Saturday, if it was fine, and they felt in the humour—well, they would see about it.

With which condescending resolution they returned to their loafings and novels and secret cigarettes, and tried to forget all about Mr. Frampton.

But Mr. Frampton had no idea of being forgotten. He had the schoolmaster's virtue of enthusiasm, but he lacked the schoolmaster's virtue of patience. He hated the dry-rot like poison, and could not rest till he had ripped up every board and rafter that harboured it.

Any ordinary reformer would have been satisfied with the week's work he had already accomplished. But Mr. Frampton added yet another blow at the very heart of the dry-rot before the week was out.

On the day before the football match Bolsover was staggered, and, so to speak, struck all of a heap by the announcement that in future the school tuck-shop would be closed until after the dinner hour!

Fellows stared at one another with a sickly, incredulous smile when they first heard the grim announcement and wondered whether, after all, the new head-master *was* an ascaped lunatic. A few gifted with more presence of mind than others bethought them of visiting the shop and of dispelling the hideous nightmare by optical demonstration.

Alas! the shutters were up. Mother Partridge was not at the receipt of custom, but instead, written in the bold, square hand of Mr. Frampton himself, there confronted them the truculent notice, "The shop will for the future be open only before breakfast and after dinner."

"Brutal!" gasped Farfield, as he read it. "Does he mean to starve us as well as drown us?"

"Hard lines for poor old Mother Partridge," suggested Scarfe.

This cry took. There was somehow a lurking sense of shame which made it difficult for Bolsover to rise in arms on account of the injury done to itself. Money had been wasted, appetites had been lost, digestions had been ruined in that shop, and they knew it.

If you had put the question to any one of the boys who crowded down, hungry after their bath, to breakfast on the day of the football match, he would have told you that Frampton was as great a brute as ever, and that it was a big shame to make fellows play whether they liked it or not. For all that, he would tell you, *he* was going to play, much as he hated it, to avoid a row. And if you had pressed him further he would have confided to you that it was expected the School would beat the Sixth, and that he rather hoped, as he must play, he would get a chance at the ball before the match was over. From all which you might gather that Bolsover was reluctantly coming round to take an interest in the event.

"Fortune favours the brave," said Mr. Steele, one of his assistants, to the head-master at dinner time. "You have conquered before you have struck, mighty Cæsar."

Mr. Frampton smiled. He was flushed and excited. Two days ago he had seemed to be committed to a desperate

venture. Now, a straight path seemed to open before him, and Bolsover, in his enthusiastic imagination, was already a reformed, reinvigorated institution.

"Yes, Steele," said he, as he glanced from the window and watched the boys trooping down towards the meadow. "This day will be remembered at Bolsover."

Little dreamed the brave head-master how truly his prophecy would be fulfilled.

An arrangement had been made to give the small boys a match of their own. The young gladiators themselves, who had secretly wept over their impending doom, were delighted to be removed beyond the reach of the giants of the Sixth. And the leaders of the School forces were devoutly thankful to be disencumbered of a crowd of meddlesome "kids" who would have spoiled sport, even if they did not litter the ground with their corpses.

The sight of the new goal posts and ball, which Mr. Freshfield, a junior master, was heard to explain was a present from the head-master to the school, had also a mollifying effect. And the bracing freshness of the air and the self-respect engendered by the sensation of their flannels (for most of the players had contrived to provide themselves with armour of this healthy material) completed their reconciliation to their lot, and drove all feelings of resentment against their tyrant, for the present at any rate, quite out of their heads.

In a hurried consultation of the seniors, Farfield, who was known to be a player, was nominated captain of the senior force; while a similar council of war among the juniors had resulted in the appointment of Ranger of the Fifth to lead the hosts of the School.

Mr. Freshfield, with all the ardour of an old general, assisted impartially in advising as to the disposition of the field on either side; and, for the benefit of such as might be inexperienced at the game, rehearsed briefly some of the chief rules of the game as played under the Rugby laws.

"Now, are you ready?" said he, when all preliminaries

were settled, and the ball lay, carefully titled, ready for Farfield's kick-off.

"Wait a bit," cried some one. "Where's Jeffreys?"

Where, indeed? No one had noticed his absence till now; and one or two boys darted off to look for him.

But before they had gone far a white apparition appeared floundering across the meadow in the direction of the goals; and a shout of derisive welcome rose, as Jeffreys, arrayed in an ill-fitting suit of white holland, and crowned with his blue flannel cap, came on to the scene.

"He's been sewing together the pillow-cases to make his trousers," said some one.

"Think of a chap putting on his dress shirt to play football in," cried another.

"Frampton said we were to wear the oldest togs we'd got," said a third, "not our Sunday best."

Jeffreys, as indeed it was intended, heard these facetious remarks on his strange toilet, and his brow grew heavy.

"Come on," said Scarfe, as he drew near, "it wasn't fair to the other side for you not to play."

"I couldn't find my boots," replied the Cad shortly, scowling round him.

"Perhaps you'll play forward," said Farfield, "and if ever you don't know what to do, go and stand outside those flag posts, and for mercy's sake let the ball alone."

"Boo-hoo! I *am* in such a funk," cried Forrester with his mocking laugh. "Thank goodness I'm playing back."

"Come now," called Mr. Freshfield impatiently, "are you ready? Kick off, Farfield. Look out, School."

Next moment the match had begun.

As might have been expected, there was at first a great deal more confusion than play. Bolsover was utterly unused to doing anything together, and football of all games needs united action.

There was a great deal of scrimmaging, but very few kicks and very few runs. The ball was half the time invisible, and the other half in touch. Mr. Freshfield had time after time

to order a throw-in to be repeated, or rule a kick as "off-side." The more ardent players forgot the duty of protecting their flanks and rear; and the more timid neglected their chances of "piling up" the scrimmages. The Sixth got in the way of the Sixth, and the School often spoiled the play of the School.

But after a quarter of an hour or so the chaos began to resolve itself, and each side, so to speak, came down to its bearings. Mr. Frampton, as he walked across from the small boys' match, was surprised as well as delighted to notice the businesslike way in which the best players on either side were settling down to their work. There was Farfield, flushed and dogged, leading on his forwards, and always on the ball. There was Scarfe, light and dodgy, ready for a run or a neat drop-kick from half-back. There was Ranger and Phipps of the Fifth, backing one another up like another Nisus and Euryalus. There was young Forrester, merry and plucky, saving his goal more than once by a prompt touch-down. There, even, was the elephantine Jeffreys, snorting and pounding in the thick of the fray, feeling his feet under him, and doing his clumsy best to fight the battle of his side.

The game went hard against the School, despite their determined rallies and gallant sorties. Young Forrester in goal had more than one man's share of work; and Scarfe's drops from the rear of the Sixth scrimmage flew near and still nearer the enemy's goal.

Once, just before half-time, he had what seemed a safe chance, but at the critical moment Jeffreys' ungainly bulk interposed, and received on his chest the ball which would certainly have carried victory to his side.

"Clumsy lout!" roared Farfield; "didn't I tell you to stand out of the way and not go near the ball—you idiot! Go and play back, do."

Jeffreys turned on him darkly.

"You think I did it on purpose," said he. "I didn't."

"Go and play back!" repeated Farfield—"or go and hang yourself."

Jeffreys took a long breath, and departed with a scowl to the rear.

"Half-time!" cried Mr. Freshfield. "Change sides."

It was a welcome summons. Both sides needed a little breathing space to gird themselves for the final tussle.

The School was elated at having so far eluded actual defeat, and cheerily rallied their opponents as they crossed over. Jeffreys, in particular, as he made moodily to his new station, came in for their jocular greetings.

"Thanks awfully, Cad, old man!" cried one; "we knew you'd give us a leg up."

"My word! doesn't he look pleased with himself!" said another. "No wonder!"

"Is that the way they taught you to play football at home?" said young Forrester, emphasizing his question with an acorn neatly pitched at the Cad's ear.

Jeffreys turned savagely with lifted arm, but Forrester was far beyond his enemy's reach, and his hand dropped heavily at his own side as he continued his sullen march to the Sixth's goal.

"Are you ready?" shouted Mr. Freshfield. "Kick off, Ranger! Look out, Sixth!"

The game recommenced briskly. The School, following up the advantage of their kick-off, and cheered by their recent luck, made a desperate onslaught into the enemy's territory, which for a while took all the energy of the Sixth to repel.

Phipps and Ranger were irrepressible, and had it not been for the steady play of Scarfe and the Sixth backs, that formidable pair of desperadoes might have turned the tide of victory by their own unaided exertions.

In the defence of the seniors, Jeffreys, it need hardly be said, took no part. He stood moodily near one of the posts, still glaring in the direction of his insulters, and apparently heedless of the fortunes of the game.

His inaction, however, was not destined to last long.

The second half game had lasted about a quarter of an hour,

and the School was still stubbornly holding their advanced position in the proximity of the enemy's goal, when the ball suddenly, and by one of those mysterious chances of battle, burst clear of the scrimmage and darted straight to where Jeffreys stood.

"Pick it up and run—like mad!" shouted Farfield.

With a sudden swoop which astonished his beholders the Cad pounced on the ball and started to run in the direction of the ill-protected goal of the School.

Till they saw him in motion with an almost clear field ahead, no one had had any conception how powerfully he was built or how fast he could run. The School, rash and sanguine of victory, had pressed to the front, leaving scarcely half a dozen behind to guard their rear.

Three of these Jeffreys had passed before the School was well aware what he was doing. Then a shout of consternation arose, mingled with the frantic cheers of the Sixth.

"Collar him! Have him over! Stop him there! Look out in goal!"

But Jeffreys was past stopping. Like a cavalry charger who dashes on to the guns heedless of everything, and for the time being gone mad, so the Bolsover Cad, with the shouts behind him and the enemy's goal in front, saw and heard nothing else. The two men who stepped out at him were brushed aside like reeds before a boat's keel; and with half the field before him only one enemy remained between him and victory.

That enemy was young Forrester!

There was something almost terrible in the furious career of the big boy as he bore down on the fated goal. Those behind ceased to pursue, and watched the result in breathless suspense.

Even the saucy light on Forrester's face faded as he hesitated a moment between fear and duty.

"Collar him there!" shouted the School.

"He'll pass him easily," said the Sixth.

Forrester stepped desperately across his adversary's path, resolved to do his duty, cost what it might.

Jeffreys never swerved from his course, right or left.

"He's going to charge the youngster!" gasped Farfield.

Forrester, who had counted on the runner trying to pass him, became suddenly aware that the huge form was bearing straight down upon him.

The boy was no coward, but for a moment he stood paralysed.

That moment was fatal. There was a crash, a shout! Next moment Jeffreys was seen staggering to his feet and carrying the ball behind the goal. But no one heeded him. Every eye was turned to where young Forrester lay on his back motionless, with his face as white as death.

CHAPTER III

Gone!

IT would be difficult to picture the horror and dismay which followed the terrible termination to the football match described in our last chapter.

For a second or two every one stood where he was, as if rooted to the ground. Then with an exclamation of horror Mr. Freshfield bounded to the side of the prostrate boy.

"Stand back and give him air!" cried the master, as the school closed round and gazed with looks of terror on the form of their companion. He lay with one arm above his head just as he had fallen. His cap lay a yard or two off where he had tossed it before making his final charge. His eyes were closed, and the deathly pallor of his face was unmoved by even a quiver of life.

"He's dead!" gasped Farfield.

Mr. Freshfield, who had been hastily loosening Forrester's collar, and had rested his hand for an instant on his heart, looked up with a face almost as white as the boy's and said—

"Go for the doctor!—and some water."

Half a dozen boys started—thankful to do anything. Before the ring could close up again the ungainly form of Jeffreys, still panting from his run, elbowed his way to the front. As his eyes fell on the form of his victim his face turned an ashy hue. Those who watched him saw that he was struggling to speak, but no words came. He stood like one turned suddenly to stone.

But not for long.

With a cry something resembling a howl, the school by a sudden simultaneous movement turned upon him.

He put up his hand instinctively, half-deprecatingly, half in self-defence. Then as his eyes dropped once more on the motionless form over which Mr. Freshfield was bending, he took half a step forward and gasped, "I did not——"

Whatever he had intended to say was drowned by another howl of execration. The sound of his voice seemed to have opened the floodgates and let loose the pent-up feelings of the onlookers. A score of boys rushed between him and his victim and hustled him roughly out of the ring.

"Murderer!" cried Scarfe as he gave the first thrust.

And amidst echoes of that terrible cry the Cad was driven forth.

Once he turned with savage face, as though he would resist and fight his way back into the ring. But it was only for a moment. It may have been a sudden glimpse of that marble face on the grass, or it may have been terror. But his uplifted hand fell again at his side, and he dragged himself dejectedly to the outskirts of the crowd.

There he still hovered, his livid face always turned towards the centre, drinking in every sound and marking every movement, but not attempting again to challenge the resentment of his schoolfellows by attempting to enter the awe-struck circle.

It seemed an age before help came. The crowd stood round silent and motionless, with their eyes fixed on the poor lifeless head which rested on Mr. Freshfield's knee; straining their eyes for one sign of animation, yearning still more for the arrival of the doctor.

Mr. Freshfield did not dare to lift the form, or even beyond gently raising the head, to move it in any way. How anxiously all watched as, when the water arrived, he softly sponged the brow and held the glass to the white lips!

Alas! the dark lashes still drooped over those closed eyes, and as each moment passed Bolsover felt that it stood in the shadow of death.

At last there was a stir, as the sound of wheels approached in the lane. And presently the figure of the doctor, accompanied by Mr. Frampton, was seen running across the meadow.

As they reached the outskirts of the crowd, Jeffreys laid his hand on the doctor's arm with an appealing gesture.

"I did not mean——" he began.

But the doctor passed on through the path which the crowd opened for him to the fallen boy's side.

It was a moment of terrible suspense as he knelt and touched the boy's wrist, and applied his ear to his chest. Then in a hurried whisper he asked two questions of Mr. Freshfield, then again bent over the inanimate form.

They could tell by the look on his face as he looked up that there was hope—for there was life!

"He's not dead!" they heard him whisper to Mr. Frampton.

Still they stood round, silent and motionless. The relief itself was terrible. He was not dead, but would those deep-fringed eyes ever open again?

The doctor whispered again to Mr. Frampton and Mr. Freshfield, and the two passed their hands under the prostrate form to lift it. But before they could do so the doctor, who never took his eyes off the boy's face, held up his hand suddenly, and said "No! Better have a hurdle," pointing to one which lay not far off on the grass.

A dozen boys darted for it, and a dozen more laid their coats upon it to make a bed. Once more, amid terrible suspense, they saw the helpless form raised gently and deposited on the hurdle. A sigh of relief escaped when the operation was over, and the sad burden, supported at each corner by the two masters, Scarfe and Farfield, began to move slowly towards the school.

"Slowly, and do not keep step. Above all things avoid a jolt," said the doctor, keeping the boy's hand in his own.

The crowd opened to let them pass, and then followed in mournful procession.

As the bearers passed on, Jeffreys, who all this time had been forgotten, but who had never once turned his face from where Forrester lay, stepped quickly forward as though to assist in carrying the litter.

His sudden movement, and the startling gesture that accompanied it, disconcerted the bearers, and caused them for a moment to quicken their step, thus imparting an unmistakable shock to the precious burden.

The doctor uttered an exclamation of vexation and ordered a halt. "Stand back, sir!" he cried angrily, waving Jeffreys back; "a jolt like that may be fatal!"

An authority still more potent than that of the doctor was at hand to prevent a recurrence of the danger. Jeffreys was flung out of reach of the litter by twenty angry hands and hounded out of the procession.

He did not attempt to rejoin it. For a moment he stood and watched it as it passed slowly on. A cold sweat stood on his brow, and every breath was a gasp. Then he turned slowly back to the spot where Forrester had fallen, and threw himself on the ground in a paroxysm of rage and misery.

It was late and growing dark as he re-entered the school. There was a strange, weird silence about the place that contrasted startlingly with the usual evening clamour. The boys were mostly in their studies or collected in whispering groups in the schoolrooms.

As Jeffreys entered, one or two small boys near the door hissed him and ran away. Others who met him in the passage and on the stairs glared at him with looks of mingled horror and aversion, which would have frozen any ordinary fellow.

Jeffreys, however, did not appear to heed it, still less to avoid it. Entering the Sixth Form room, he found most of his colleagues gathered, discussing the tragedy of the day in the dim light of the bay window. So engrossed were they that they never noticed his entrance, and it was not till after standing a minute listening to their talk he broke in, in his loud tones—

"Is Forrester dead?"

The sound of his voice, so harsh and unexpected, had the effect of an explosion in their midst.

They recoiled from it, startled and half scared. Then, quickly perceiving the intruder, they turned upon him with a howl.

But this time the Cad did not retreat before them. He held up his hand to stop them with a gesture almost of authority.

"Don't!" he exclaimed. "I'll go. But tell me, some one, is he dead?"

His big form loomed out in the twilight a head taller than any of his companions, and there was something in his tone and attitude that held them back.

"You will be sorry to hear," said Scarfe, one of the first to recover his self-control, and with a double-edge of bitterness in his voice, "that he was alive an hour ago."

Jeffreys gave a gasp, and held up his hand again.

"Is there hope for him, then?"

"Not with you in the school, you murderer!" exclaimed Farfield, advancing on the Cad, and striking him on the mouth.

Farfield had counted the cost, and was prepared for the furious onslaught which he felt certain would follow.

But Jeffreys seemed scarcely even to be aware of the blow. He kept his eyes on Scarfe, to whom he had addressed his last question, and said—

"You won't believe me. I didn't mean it."

"Don't tell lies," said Scarfe, "you did—coward!"

Jeffreys turned on his heel with what sounded like a sigh. The fury of his companions, which had more than once been on the point of breaking loose in the course of the short conference, vented itself in a howl as the door closed behind him. And yet, some said to themselves, would a murderer have stood and faced them all as he had done?

The long night passed anxiously and sleeplessly for most of the inhabitants of Bolsover. The event of the day had

awed them into something like a common feeling. They forgot their own petty quarrels and grievances for the time, and thought of nothing but poor Forrester.

The doctor and Mr. Frampton never quitted his room all night. Boys who, refusing to go to bed, sat anxiously, with their study doors open, eager to catch the first sound proceeding from that solemn chamber, waited in vain, and dropped asleep where they sat as the night gave place to dawn. Even the masters hovered restlessly about with careworn faces, and full of misgivings as hour passed hour without tidings.

At length—it was about ten o'clock, and the school bell was just beginning to toll for morning chapel—the door opened, and Mr. Frampton stepped quickly out of the sick-room.

"Stop the bell at once!" he said.

Then Forrester must still be living!

"How is he?" asked a dozen voices, as the head-master passed down the corridor.

"There is hope," said Mr. Frampton, "and, thank God! signs of returning consciousness."

And with that grain of comfort wearied Bolsover filed slowly into church.

As Mr. Frampton reached his study door he found Scarfe and Farfield waiting for him.

"Well?" said he wearily, seeing that they had something to say. "Come in."

They followed him into the room.

"Is there really hope?" said Scarfe, who truly loved the injured boy.

"I think so. He never moved or showed sign of life, except the beating of his heart, till an hour ago. Then he moved his head and opened his eyes."

"Did he know you, sir?"

"The doctor thinks he did. But everything depends now on quiet and care."

"We wanted to speak to you, sir, about the—the accident," said Farfield with a little hesitation.

"Yes. I have hardly heard how it happened, except that he fell in attempting to collar Jeffreys. Was it not so?"

"Yes, sir," replied Farfield. "But——"

"Well, what?" asked Mr. Frampton, noticing his hesitation.

"We don't feel sure that it was altogether an accident," said Farfield.

"What! Do you mean that the boy was intentionally injured?"

"Jeffreys might easily have run round him. Anybody else would. He had the whole field to himself, and no one even near him behind."

"But was it not Forrester who got in front of him?"

"Of course he tried to collar him, sir," said Scarfe; "but he's only a little boy, and Jeffreys is a giant. Jeffreys might have fended him off with his arm, as he did the other fellows who had tried to stop him, or he might have run round him. Instead of that"—and here the speaker's voice trembled with indignation—"he charged dead at him, and ran right over him."

Mr. Frampton's face clouded over.

"Jeffreys is a clumsy fellow, is he not?" he asked.

"Yes," said Scarfe; "and if it had been any one else than Forrester, we should all have put it down to his stupidity."

"You mean," said the head-master, "that he had a quarrel with Forrester?"

"He hated Forrester. Every one knew that. Forrester used to make fun of him and enrage him."

"And you mean to tell me you believe this big boy of nineteen, out of revenge, deliberately ran over young Forrester in the way you describe?"

"I'm sure of it, sir," said Farfield unhesitatingly.

"No one doubts it," said Scarfe.

Mr. Frampton took an uneasy turn up and down the room. He hated tale-bearers; but this seemed a case in which he was bound to listen and inquire further.

"Scarfe and Farfield," said he, after a long pause, "you

know of course as well as I do the nature of the charge you are bringing against your schoolfellow—the most awful charge one human being can bring against another. Are you prepared to repeat all you have said to me in Jeffreys' presence to-morrow, and before the whole school?"

"Certainly, sir," said both boys.

"It was our duty to tell you, sir," said Scarfe; "and only fair to poor young Forrester."

"Nothing less than a sense of duty could justify the bringing of such a terrible accusation," said the head-master, "and I am relieved that you are prepared to repeat it publicly—to-morrow. For to-day, let us thank God for the hope He gives us of the poor sufferer. Good-bye."

Much as he could have wished it, it was impossible for Mr. Frampton, wearied out as he was with his night's watching, to dismiss from his mind the serious statement which his two senior boys had made. The responsibility which rested on him in consequence was terrible, and it required all his courage to face it.

That afternoon he sent for Mr. Freshfield, and repeated to him the substance of the accusation against Jeffreys, asking him if he had noticed anything calculated to confirm the suspicion expressed by the boys.

Mr. Freshfield was naturally very much startled.

"If you had not mentioned it," he said, "I should never have dreamed of such a thing. But I confess I have noticed that Forrester and Jeffreys were on bad terms. Forrester is a mischievous boy, and Jeffreys, who you know is rather a lout, seems to have been his special butt. I am afraid, too, that Jeffreys' short temper rather encouraged his tormentors."

"Yes, but about the accident," said Mr. Frampton; "you were on the ground, you know. Did you notice anything then?"

"There was a little horseplay as the sides were changing over at half-time. Forrester, among others, was taunting Jeffreys with a bad piece of play, and threw something at him. I was rather struck by the look almost of fury which

passed across Jeffreys' face. But it seemed to me he got better of his feelings with an effort and went on without heeding what was said to him."

"That was not long before the accident?"

"About a quarter of an hour. His run down the field at the last was really a good piece of play, and every one seemed surprised. But there was any amount of room and time to get past Forrester instead of charging right on to him. It's possible, of course, he may have lost his head and not seen what he was doing."

Mr. Frampton shrugged his shoulders.

"Well," said he with a dejected look, "I wish you could have told me anything but what you have. At any rate, to-morrow morning the matter must be faced and decided upon. Jeffreys is unpopular in the school, is he not?"

"Most unpopular," said Mr. Freshfield.

"That will make our responsibility all the greater," said the head-master. "He will have every one's hand against him."

"And you may be quite certain he will do himself injustice. He always does. But what of Forrester?"

"He is conscious, and has taken some nourishment; that is all I can say, except, indeed," added Mr. Frampton, with a groan, "that if he lives the doctor says it will be as a cripple."

The day dragged wearily on, and night came at last. Most of the boys, worn out with their last night's vigil, went to bed and slept soundly. The doctor, too, leaving his patient in the charge of a trained nurse, specially summoned, returned home, reporting hopefully of the case as he departed.

In two studies at Bolsover that night, however, there was no rest. Far into the night Mr. Frampton paced to and fro across the floor. His hopes and ambitions had fallen like a house of cards. The school he had been about to reform and regenerate had sunk in one day lower than ever before. There was something worse than dry-rot in it now. But Mr. Frampton was a brave man; and that

night he spent in arming himself for the task that lay before him. Yet how he dreaded that scene to-morrow! How he wished that this hideous nightmare were after all a dream, and that he could awake and find Bolsover where it was even yesterday morning!

The other watcher was Jeffreys. He had slept not a wink the night before, and to-night sleep seemed still more impossible. Had you seen him as he sat there listlessly in his chair, with his gaunt, ugly face and restless lips, you would have been inclined, I hope, to pity him, cad as he was. Hour after hour he sat there without changing his posture, cloud after cloud chasing one another across his brow, as they chased one another across the pale face of the moon outside.

At length, as it seemed, with an effort he rose to his feet and slipped off his boots. His candle had burned nearly out, but the moon was bright enough to light his room without it, so he extinguished it and softly opened the door.

The passage was silent, the only sounds being the heavy breathing somewhere of a weary boy, and the occasional creaking of a board as he crept along on tip-toe.

At the end of the passage he turned aside a few steps to a door, and stood listening. Some one was moving inside. There was the rustle of a dress and the tinkle of a spoon in a cup. Then he heard a voice, and oh, how his heart beat as he listened!

"I'm tired," it said wearily.

That was all. Jeffreys heard the smoothing of a pillow and a woman's soothing whisper hushing the sufferer to rest.

The drops stood in beads on his brow as he stood there and listened.

In a little all became quiet, and presently a soft, regular breathing told him that some one was sleeping.

He put his hand cautiously to the handle and held it there a minute before he dared turn it. At last he did so, and opened the door a few inches. The breathing went regularly on. Inch by inch he pushed the door back till he could catch

a glimpse in the moonlight of the bed, and a dark head of hair on the pillow. An inch or two more, and he could see the whole room and the nurse dozing in the corner. Stealthily, like a thief, he advanced into the room and approached the bed. The sufferer was lying motionless, and still breathing regularly.

Jeffreys took a step forward to look at his face. At that moment the moonlight streamed in at the window and lit up the room. Then, to his terror, he noticed that the patient was awake, and lying with eyes wide open gazing at the ceiling. Suddenly, and before Jeffreys could withdraw, the eyes turned and met his. For an instant they rested there vacantly, then a gasp and a shriek of horror proclaimed that Forrester had recognized him.

In a moment he was outside the door, and had closed it before the nurse started up from her slumber.

He had not been in his study a minute when he heard a sound of footsteps and whispered voices without. The boy's cry had reached the wakeful ears of Mr. Frampton, and already he was on his way to the sick-chamber.

Jeffreys sank down on his bed in an agony of terror and suspense. The boy's cry resounded in his ears and deafened him, till at last he could endure it no longer.

* * * * *

Next morning, when the school was gathered in the hall, after prayers, Mr. Frampton, looking round him, missed the figure that was uppermost in his thoughts.

"Will some one tell Jeffreys to come here?" he said.

Mr. Freshfield went, but returned suddenly to announce that Jeffreys' study was empty, and that a rope formed of sheets suspended from his window made it evident he had escaped in the night and quitted Bolsover.

CHAPTER IV

Gone Again

ON the evening following Jeffreys' departure from Bolsover, a middle-aged, handsome gentleman was sitting in his comfortable study in the city of York, whistling pleasantly to himself.

The house in which he lived was a small one, yet roomy enough for an old bachelor. And what it wanted in size it made up for in the elegance and luxury of its furniture and adornments.

Mr. Halgrove was evidently a connoisseur in the art of making himself comfortable. Everything about him was of the best, and bespoke not only a man of taste but a man of means. The books on the shelves—and where can you find any furniture to match a well-filled book-case?—were well chosen and well bound. The pictures on the walls were all works of art and most tastefully hung. The knick-knacks scattered about the room were ornamental as well as useful. Even the collie dog which lay luxuriously on the hearthrug with one eye half open was as beautiful as he was faithful.

Mr. Halgrove whistled pleasantly to himself as he stirred his coffee and glanced down the columns of the London paper.

If you had looked over his shoulder, you would have come to the conclusion that Mr. Halgrove's idea of what was interesting in a newspaper and your own by no means coincided.

He was, in fact, reading the money article, and running his eye skilfully among the mazes of the stocks and shares there reported.

Suddenly there was a ring at the hall door and a man's voice in the hall. Next moment the study door opened, and amid the frantic rejoicings of Julius, John Jeffreys walked into the presence of his guardian. He was haggard and travel-stained, and Mr. Halgrove, in the midst of his astonishment, noticed that his boots were nearly in pieces. Bolsover was fifty-five miles from York, and the roads were rough and stony. The guardian, whatever astonishment he felt at this unexpected apparition, gave no sign of it in his face, as he sat back in his chair and took several quiet whiffs of his weed before he addressed his visitor.

"Ah!" said he, "you've broken up early."

"No, sir," said Jeffreys. "Please may I have something to eat?"

"Help yourself to the bread and butter there," said Mr. Halgrove, pointing to the remains of his own tea, "and see if you can squeeze anything out of the coffee-pot. If not, ring for some more hot water. Lie down, Julius!"

Jeffreys ate the bread and butter ravenously, and drank what was left in the coffee-pot and milk-jug.

Mr. Halgrove went on with his cigar, watching his ward curiously.

"The roads are rough for walking this time of the year," observed he.

"Yes," said Jeffreys; "I've walked all the way."

"Good exercise," said Mr. Halgrove. "How long did it take you?"

"I left Bolsover at half-past four this morning."

Mr. Halgrove looked at his watch.

"Fifteen hours—a fairly good pace," said he.

A silence ensued, during which time guardian and ward remained eyeing one another, the one curiously, the other anxiously.

"Why not sit down," said Mr. Halgrove, when it became

evident his ward was not going to open the conversation, "after your long walk?"

Jeffreys dropped heavily into the chair nearest to him and Julius came up and put his head between his knees.

"Do you often take country walks of this sort?" said the guardian.

"No, sir; I've run away from Bolsover."

Mr. Halgrove raised his eyebrows.

"Indeed! Was it for the fun of the thing, or for any special reason?"

"It was because I have killed a boy," said Jeffreys hoarsely.

It spoke volumes for Mr. Halgrove's coolness that he took this alarming announcement without any sign of emotion.

"Have you?" said he. "And was that for fun, or for any special reason?"

"I didn't mean it; it was an accident," said Jeffreys.

"Is the story worth repeating?" asked the guardian, knocking the ash off the end of the cigar, and settling himself in his chair.

Jeffreys told the story in a blundering, mixed-up way, but quite clearly enough for Mr. Halgrove.

"So you meant to run at him, though you didn't mean to kill him?" said he, when the narrative was ended.

"I did not mean to kill him," repeated the boy doggedly.

"Of course it would not occur to you that you were twice his size and weight, and that running over him meant—well manslaughter."

"I never thought it for a moment—not for a moment."

"Was the accident fatal, at once, may I ask?"

"No, sir; he was brought to the school insensible, and remained so for more than twelve hours. Then he became conscious, and seemed to be doing well."

"A temporary rally, I suppose?" observed the guardian.

Jeffreys' mouth worked uneasily, and his pale brow became overcast again.

"No, I believe if it hadn't been for me he might have recovered."

"Indeed," said the other, once more raising his eyebrows; "what further attention did you bestow on him—not poison, I hope?"

"No, but I went to his room in the middle of the night and startled him, and gave him a shock."

"Yes; playing bogey is liable to alarm invalids. I have always understood so," said Mr. Halgrove drily.

"I didn't mean to startle him. I fancied he was asleep, and just wanted to see how he seemed to be getting on. No one would tell me a word about him," said Jeffreys miserably.

"And that killed him outright?"

"I'm afraid it must have," said Jeffreys. "The doctor had said the least shock would be fatal, and this was a very great shock."

"It would be. You did not, however, wait to see?"

"No; I waited an hour or two, and then I ran away."

"Did you say good-bye to the head-master before leaving?"

"No; nobody knew of my going."

"Of course you left your address behind you, in case you should be invited to attend the inquest."

"They know where I live," said Jeffreys.

"Indeed! And may *I* ask where you live?"

The ward's face fell at the question.

"Here, sir," faltered he.

"Pardon me, I think you are mistaken, John Jeffreys."

Jeffreys looked hard at his guardian, as if to ascertain whether or not he spoke seriously. His one longing at that moment was for food and rest. Since Saturday morning his eyes had never closed, and yet, strange as it may seem, he could take in no more of the future than what lay before him on this one night. The sudden prospect now of being turned out into the street was overwhelming.

"I think you are mistaken," repeated Mr. Halgrove, tossing the end of his cigar into the fireplace and yawning.

"But, sir," began Jeffreys, raising himself slowly to his

feet, for he was stiff and cramped after his long journey, "I've walked——"

"So you said," interrupted Mr. Halgrove, incisively. "You will be used to it."

At that moment Jeffreys decided the question of his night's lodging in a most unlooked-for manner by doing what he had never done before, and what he never did again.

He fainted.

When he next was aware of anything he was lying in his own bed upstairs in broad daylight, and Mr. Halgrove's housekeeper was depositing a tray with some food upon it at his side. He partook gratefully, and dropped off to sleep again without rousing himself enough to recall the events of the past evening. When, however, late in the afternoon, he awoke, and went over in his mind the events of the last few days, a dismal feeling of anxiety came over him and dispelled the comfort of his present situation. He got out of bed slowly and painfully, for he was very stiff and footsore. He knew not at what moment his guardian might return to the unpleasant topic of last night s conversation, and he resolved to end his own suspense as speedily as possible. He took a bath and dressed, and then descended resolutely but with sad misgivings to the library. Mr. Halgrove was sitting where his ward had left him yesterday evening.

"Ah," said he, as the boy entered, "early rising's not your strong point, is it?"

"I only woke half an hour ago."

"And you are anxious, of course, to know whether you have been inquired for by the police?" said the guardian, paring his nails.

Jeffreys' face fell.

"Has some one been?" he asked. "Have you heard anything?"

"No one has been as yet except the postman. He brought me a letter from Bolsover, which will probably interest you more than it does me. It's there on the table."

Jeffreys took up a letter addressed in Mr. Frampton's hand.

"Am I to read it?"

"As you please."

Jeffreys opened the letter and read:—

"BOLSOVER, *October* 12.

"S. HALGROVE, Esq.

"DEAR SIR,—I regret to inform you that your ward, John Jeffreys, left Bolsover secretly last night, and has not up to the present moment returned. If he has returned to you, you will probably have learned by this time the circumstances which led him to take the step he has. (Here Mr. Frampton briefly repeated the story of the football accident.) The patient still lingers, although the doctors do not at present hold out much hope of ultimate recovery. I am not inclined to credit the statement current in the school with regard to the sad event, that the injury done to the small boy was not wholly due to accident. Still, under the grave circumstances, which are made all the more serious by your ward's flight, I suggest to you that you should use your authority to induce Jeffreys to return here—at any rate for as long as Forrester's fate remains precarious; or, failing that, that you should undertake, in the event of a legal inquiry being necessary, that he shall be present if required.

"Faithfully yours,

"T. FRAMPTON."

"Pleasant letter, is it not?" said Mr. Halgrove as Jeffreys replaced it in its envelope and laid it again on the table.

"I can't go back to Bolsover," said he.

"No? You think you are not appreciated there?"

Jeffreys winced.

"But I will undertake to go there if——"

"If the coroner invites you, eh?"

"Yes," replied the boy.

"The slight difficulty about that is that it is I, not you, that am asked to make the undertaking."

"But you will, won't you?" asked Jeffreys eagerly.

"I have the peculiarity of being rather particular about the people I give undertakings for," said Mr. Halgrove, flicking a speck of dust off his sleeve; "it may be ridiculous, but I draw the line at homicide."

"You're a liar!" exclaimed the ward, in a burst of fury, which, however, he repented of almost before the words had escaped him.

Mr. Halgrove was not in the slightest degree disturbed by this undutiful outbreak, but replied coolly,—

"In that case, you see, my undertaking would be worth nothing. No. What do you say to replying to Mr. Frampton's suggestion yourself?"

"I will write and tell him I will go whenever he wants me."

"The only objection to that," observed the guardian, "will be the difficulty in giving him any precise address, will it not?"

Jeffreys winced again.

"You mean to turn me adrift?" said he bluntly.

"Your perception is excellent, my young friend."

"When?"

Mr. Halgrove looked at his watch.

"I believe Mrs. Jessop usually locks up about eleven. It would be a pity to keep her up after that hour."

Jeffreys gulped down something like a sigh and turned to the door.

"Not going, are you?" said the guardian. "It's early yet."

"I am going," replied the ward quietly.

"By the way," said Mr. Halgrove, as he reached the door, "by the way, John——"

Jeffreys stopped with his hand on the latch.

"I was going to say," said the guardian, rising and looking for his cigar-case, "that the little sum of money which was left by your father, and invested for your benefit, has very unfortunately taken to itself wings, owing to the failure of the undertaking in which it happened to be invested. I

have the papers here, and should like to show them to you, if you can spare me five minutes."

Jeffreys knew nothing about money. Hitherto his school fees had been paid, and a small regular allowance for pocket-money had been sent him quarterly by his guardian. Now his guardian's announcement conveyed little meaning to him beyond the fact that he had no money to count upon. He never expected he would have; so he was not disappointed.

"I don't care to see the papers," he said.

"You are a philosopher, my friend," said his guardian. "But I have sufficient interest in you, despite your financial difficulties, to believe you might find this five-pound note of service on your travels."

"No, thank you," said Jeffreys, putting his hand behind his back.

"Don't mention it," said his guardian, returning it to his pocket. "There is, when I come to think of it," added he, "a sovereign which really belongs to you. It is the balance of your last quarter's allowance, which I had been about to send to you this week. I would advise you to take it."

"Is it really mine?"

"Pray come and look over the accounts. I should like to satisfy you."

"If it is really mine I will take it," said the boy.

"You are sensible," said his guardian, putting it into his hand. "You are perfectly safe in taking it. It is yours. It will enable you to buy a few postage stamps. I shall be interested to hear of your success. Good-bye."

Jeffreys, ignoring the hand which was held out to him, walked silently from the room. Mr. Halgrove stood a moment and listened to the retreating footsteps. Then he returned to his chair and rang the bell.

"Mrs. Jessop," said he, "Mr. Jeffreys is going on a journey. Will you kindly see he has a good meal before starting?"

Mrs. Jessop went upstairs and found Jeffreys writing a letter.

"Master says you're going a journey, sir."

"Yes. I shall be starting in half an hour."

"Can't you put it off till to-morrow, sir?"

"No, thanks. But I want to finish this letter."

"Well, sir, there'll be some supper for you in the parlour. It's master's orders."

Jeffreys' letter was to Mr. Frampton.

"Sir," he wrote, "I left Bolsover because I could not bear to be there any longer. I did not mean to injure Forrester so awfully, though I was wicked enough to have a spite against him. I am not a murderer, though I am as bad as one. If I could do anything to help Forrester get better I would come, but I should only make everything worse. My guardian has turned me away, and I shall have to find employment. But the housekeeper here, Mrs. Jessop, will always know where I am, and send on to me if I am wanted. I should not think of hiding away till I hear that Forrester is better. If he dies I should not care to live, so I should be only too glad to give myself up. I cannot come back to Bolsover now, even if I wanted, as I have only a pound, and my guardian tells me that is all the money I have in the world. Please write and say if Forrester is better. I am too miserable to write more.

"Yours truly,

"JOHN JEFFREYS."

Having finished this dismal letter, he packed up one or two of his things in a small handbag and descended to the parlour. There he found an ample supper provided for him by the tender-hearted Mrs. Jessop, who had a pretty shrewd guess as to the nature of the "journey" that her master's ward was about to take. But Jeffreys was not hungry, and the announcement that the meal was there by the "master's orders" turned him against it.

"I can't eat anything, thank you," he said to Mrs. Jessop, "you gave me such a good tea only a little while ago."

"But you've a long journey, Master John. Is it a long journey, sir?"

"I don't know yet," he said. "But I want you to promise to send me on any letter or message that comes, will you?"

"Where to?"

"To the head post-office, here."

"Here? Then you're not going out of York?"

"Not at first. I'll let you know when I go where to send on the letters."

"Mr. John," said the housekeeper, "the master's turned you away. Isn't that it?"

"Perhaps he's got a reason for it. Good-bye, Mrs. Jessop."

"Oh, but Mr. John——"

But John interrupted her with a kiss on her motherly cheek, and next moment was gone.

CHAPTER V

Freddy and Teddy

JOHN JEFFREYS, as he stood in the street that October evening, had no more idea what his next step was to be than had Mr. Halgrove or the motherly Mrs. Jessop. He was a matter-of-fact youth, and not much given to introspection; but the reader may do well on this particular occasion to take a hasty stock of him as he walked aimlessly down the darkening street.

He was nineteen years old. In appearance he was particularly ugly in face and clumsy in build. Against that, he was tall and unusually powerful whenever he chose to exert his strength. In mind he was reputed slow and almost stupid, although he was a good classical scholar and possessed a good memory. He was cursed with a bad and sometimes ungovernable temper. He was honest and courageous. He rarely knew how to do the right thing at the right time or in the right place. And finally he had a bad name, and believed himself to be a homicide. Such was the commonplace creature who, with a sovereign in his pocket and the whole world before him, paced the streets of York that Tuesday night.

On one point his mind was made up. He must remain in York for the present, prepared at a moment's notice to repair to Bolsover, should the dreaded summons come. With that exception, as I have said, his mind was open, and utterly devoid of ideas as to the future.

He directed his steps to the poor part of the town, not so much because it was poor, as because it was farthest away from his guardian's. He resolved that to-night at any rate he would indulge in the luxury of a bed, and accordingly, selecting the least repulsive-looking of a number of tenements offering "Cheap beds for Single Men," he turned in and demanded lodging. To the end of his days he looked back on the "cheap bed" he that night occupied with a shudder. And he was by no means a Sybarite, either. Happily, he had still some sleep to make up; and despite his foul bed, his unattractive fellow-lodgers, and his own dismal thoughts, he fell asleep, in his clothes and with his bag under his pillow, and slept till morning.

He partook of a cheap breakfast at a coffee-stall on one of the bridges, and occupied the remainder of the time before the opening of business houses in wandering about on the city walls, endeavouring to make up his mind what calling in life he should seek to adopt. He had not decided this knotty point when the minster chimes struck ten, and reminded him that he was letting the precious moments slip. So he descended into the streets, determined to apply for the first vacancy which presented itself.

Wandering aimlessly on, he came presently upon a bookseller's shop, outside which were displayed several trays of second-hand volumes which attracted his attention. Jeffreys loved books and was a voracious reader, and in the midst of his wearisome search for work it was like a little harbour of refuge to come upon a nest of them here. Just, however, as he was about to indulge in the delicious luxury of turning over the contents of the tempting trays, his eye was attracted by a half-sheet of note-paper gummed on to the shop window and bearing the inscription, "Assistant wanted. Apply within."

Next instant Jeffreys stood within.

"I see you want an assistant," said he to the old spectacled bookseller who inquired his business.

"That's right."

"Will you take me?"

The man glanced up and down at his visitor and said doubtfully,—

"Don't know you—are you in the trade?"

"No, I've just left school."

"What do you know about books?"

"I love them," replied the candidate simply.

The bookseller's face lit up and shot a glow of hope into the boy's heart.

"You love them. I like that. But take my advice, young fellow, and if you love books, don't turn bookseller."

Jeffreys' face fell.

"I'm not afraid of getting to hate them," said he.

The man beamed again.

"What's your name, my lad?"

"John Jeffreys."

"And you've just left school? What school?"

Alas! poor Jeffreys! It cost him a struggle to utter the name.

"Bolsover."

"Bolsover, eh? Do you know Latin?"

"Yes—and Greek," replied the candidate.

The bookseller took up a book that lay on the table. It was an old and valuable edition of Pliny's *Epistles*.

"Read us some of that."

Jeffreys was able fairly well to accomplish the task, greatly to the delight of the old bookseller.

"Capital! You're the first chap I ever had who could read Pliny off."

Jeffreys' face lit up. The man spoke as if the thing was settled.

"How will fifteen shillings a week and your meals suit you?" said he.

"Perfectly!" replied the candidate.

"Hum! you've got a character, of course?"

Poor Jeffreys' face fell.

"Do you mean testimonials?"

"No. You can refer to some one who knows you—your old schoolmaster, for instance."

"I'm afraid not," faltered the boy.

The man looked perplexed.

"Couldn't get a character from him—why not?"

"Because I ran away from school."

"Oh, oh! Did they ill-treat you, then, or starve you?" Come; better tell the truth."

"No—it wasn't that. It was because—" Jeffreys gave one longing look at the shelves of beloved books, and an appealing glance at his questioner—"It was because I—nearly killed a boy."

The man whistled and looked askance at his visitor.

"By accident?"

"Partly. Partly not. But I assure you——"

"That will do," said the man; "that's quite enough. Be off!"

Jeffreys departed without another word. Like Tantalus, the tempting fruit had been within reach, and his evil destiny had come in to dash it from his lips. Was it wonderful if he felt disposed to give it up and in sheer desperation go back to Bolsover?

The whole of the remainder of that day was spent in spiritless wandering about the streets. Once he made another attempt to obtain work, this time at a merchant's office. But again the inconvenient question of character was raised, and he was compelled to denounce himself. This time his confession was even more unfeelingly received than at the bookseller's.

"How dare you come here, you scoundrel?" exclaimed the merchant in a rage.

"Don't call me a scoundrel!" retorted Jeffreys, his temper suddenly breaking out.

"I'll call a policeman if you are not out of here in half a minute. Here, you boys," added he, calling his six or eight clerks, "turn this wretch out of the place. Do you hear?"

Jeffreys spared them the trouble and stepped into the

street, determined to die before he laid himself open to such an indignity again.

His last night's experience at a common lodging-house did not tempt him to seek shelter again now, and as it was a fine mild night even at that time of year he trudged out of York into one of the suburbs, where at least everything was clean and quiet. He had the good fortune in a country lane to come across a wagon laid up by the roadside, just inside a field—a lodging far more tempting than that offered by Mr. Josephs, and considerably cheaper. The fatigues and troubles of the day operated like a feather-bed for the worn-out and dispirited outcast, and he slept soundly, dreaming of Forrester, and the bookshop, and the dog Julius.

Next morning the weary search began again. Jeffreys, as he trudged back to the city, felt that he was embarked on a forlorn hope. Yet a man must live, and a sovereign cannot last for ever. He passed a railway embankment where a gang of navvies were hard at work. As he watched them he felt half envious. They had work to do, they had homes to return to at night, they had characters, perhaps. Most of them were big strong fellows like himself. Why should he not become one of them? He fancied he could wheel a barrow, and ply a crowbar, and dig with a spade, as well as any of them; he was not afraid of hard work any more than they were, and the wages that kept a roof over their heads would surely keep a roof over his.

As he sat on a bank by the roadside and watched them, he had almost resolved to walk across to the foreman and ask for a job, when the sound of voices close to him arrested him.

They were boys' voices, and their talk evidently referred to himself.

"Come along, Teddy," said one. "He won't hurt."

"I'm afraid," said the other. "He's so ugly."

"Perhaps that's how he gets his living—scaring the crows," said the first speaker.

"He looks as if he meant to kill us."

"I shall fight him if he tries."

Jeffreys looked round and had a view of the valiant speaker and his companion.

They were two neatly dressed little fellows, hand-in-hand, and evidently brothers. The younger—he who considered his life in danger—was about eight, his intrepid brother being apparently about a year his senior. They had little satchels over their shoulders, and parti-coloured cricket caps on their little curly heads. Their faces were bright and shining, the knees of their stockings were elaborately darned, the little hands were unmistakably ink-stained, and their pockets were bulged out almost to bursting.

Such was the apparition which confronted the Bolsover "cad" as he sat slowly making up his mind to become a labourer.

The younger brother drew back and began to cry, as soon as he perceived that the terrible villain on the bank had turned and was regarding them.

"Freddy, Freddy, run!" he cried.

"I shan't," said Freddy with a big heave of his chest. "I'm not afraid." The fluttering heart beneath that manly bosom belied the words, as Freddy, dragging his brother by the hand, walked forward.

Jeffreys did not exactly know what to do. Were he to rise and approach the little couple the consequences might be disastrous. Were he to remain where he was or skulk away, he would be allowing them to believe him the ruffian they thought him, and that lane would become a daily terror to their little lives. The only thing was to endeavour to make friends.

"What are you afraid of?" said he, in as gentle a manner as he could. "I won't hurt you."

The sound of his voice caused the smaller boy to scream outright, and even the elder trembled a little as he kept himself full front to the enemy.

"You little donkeys, I'm a schoolboy myself," said Jeffreys.

This announcement had a magical effect. The younger

brother stopped short in his scream, and Freddy boldly took two steps forward.

"Are you a boy?" inquired the latter.

"Of course I am. I was in the top form. I'm older than you, though."

"I'm ten," replied the proud owner of that venerable age.

"I'm nine in February," chimed in the still-fluttered junior.

"I'm about as old as you two put together. How old's that, Freddy?"

"Nineteen," said Freddy.

By this time Jeffreys had gradually descended the bank and stood close to the two small brothers.

"Bravo, young 'un, you can do sums, I see!"

"Compound division and vulgar fractions," said Freddy confidentially.

Jeffreys gave a whistle of admiration which won the heart of his hearer.

"Are you going to school now?" inquired the latter.

"No; I've left school," said Jeffreys, "last week."

"Last week! why, it's only the middle of the term. Were you sent away?"

Jeffreys began to feel uncomfortable in the presence of this small cross-examiner.

"I got into trouble and had to leave."

"I know why," said the younger brother, plucking up courage.

"Why?" inquired Jeffreys, with an amused smile.

"Because you were so ugly!"

Jeffreys laughed. "Thank you," said he.

"Was it because you killed the master?" asked the more matter-of-fact Freddy.

Poor Jeffreys winced before this random shot, and hastened to divert the conversation.

"Whose school do you go to?" he inquired.

"Trimble s; we hate her," said the two youths in a breath.

"Why? Does she whack you?"

"No; but she worries us, and young Trimble's worse still. Do you know the school?"

"No. What's the name of the house?"

"Oh, Galloway House, in Ebor Road. It wasn't so bad when Fison was there," continued the open-hearted Freddy; "but now he's gone. Trimble's a cad."

"We hate her," chimed in the original Teddy.

"We hope the new master will be like Fison, but I don't believe Trimble can get any one to come," said Freddy.

Jeffreys pricked up his ears and asked a good many questions about the school, which the youthful pair readily and gaily replied to, and then suggested that if Trimble was such a cad the boys had better not be late.

"Have some parliament cake?" said Freddy, opening his satchel and producing a large square of crisp gingerbread.

Jeffreys had not the heart to refuse a little piece of this delicacy, and enjoyed it more than the most sumptuous meal in an hotel. Teddy also insisted on his taking a bite out of his apple.

"Good-bye," said the little fellow, putting up his face in the most natural manner for a kiss. Jeffreys felt quite staggered by this unexpected attention, but recovered his presence of mind enough to do what was expected of him. Freddy, on the other hand, looked rather alarmed at his young brother's audacity, and contented himself with holding out his hand.

"Good-bye, little chap," said Jeffreys, feeling a queer lump in his throat and not exactly knowing which way to look.

Next moment the two little brothers were trotting down the road hand-in-hand as gay as young larks. Jeffreys thought no more about the navvies, or the delights of a labourer's life. A new hope was in him, and he strolled slowly back into York wondering to himself if angels ever come to men in the shape of little schoolboys.

It was still early when he reached the city. So he spent sixpence of his little store on a bath in the swimming baths, and another sixpence on some breakfast. Then, refreshed in body and mind, he called at the post-office. There was nothing for him there. Though he hardly expected any letter yet, his heart sunk as he thought what news might possibly be on its way to him at that moment. The image of Forrester as he lay on the football field haunted him constantly, and he would have given all the world even then to know that he was alive. Hope, however, came to his rescue, and helped him for a time to shake off the weight of his heart, and address himself boldly to the enterprise he had in hand.

That enterprise the acute reader has easily guessed. He would offer his services to the worthy Mrs. Trimble, *vice* Mr. Fison, resigned. He never imagined his heart could beat as quickly as it did when after a long search he read the words—"GALLOWAY HOUSE. SELECT SCHOOL FOR LITTLE BOYS," inscribed on a board in the front garden of a small, old-fashioned house in Ebor Road.

The sound of children's voices in the yard at the side apprised him that he had called at a fortunate time. Mrs. Trimble during the play-hour would in all probability be disengaged.

Mrs. Trimble was disengaged, and opened the door herself. Jeffreys beheld a stoutish harmless-looking woman, with a face by no means forbidding, even if it was decidedly unintellectual.

"Well, young man," said she. She had been eating, and, I regret to say, had not finished doing so before she began to speak.

"Can I see Mrs. Trimble, please?" asked Jeffreys, raising his hat. The lady, finding her visitor was a gentleman, hastily wiped her mouth and answered rather less brusquely.

"I am the lady," said she.

"Excuse me," said Jeffreys, "I called to ask if you

were in want of an assistant teacher. I heard that you were."

"How did you hear that, I wonder? I suppose he's a friend of that Fison. Yes, young man, I am in want of an assistant."

"I should do my best to please you, if you would let me come," said Jeffreys. And then, anxious to avoid the painful subject of his character, he added, "I have not taught in a school before, and I have no friends here, so I can't give you any testimonials. But I am well up in classics and pretty good in mathematics, and would work hard, ma'am, if you would try me."

"Are you a steady young man? Do you drink?"

"I never touch anything but water; and I am quite steady."

"What wages do you expect?"

"I leave that to you. I will work for nothing for a month till you see if I suit you."

Mrs. Trimble liked this. It looked like a genuine offer.

"Are you good-tempered and kind to children?" she asked.

"I am very fond of little boys, and I always try to keep my temper."

His heart sank at the prospect of other questions of this kind. But Mrs. Trimble was not of a curious disposition. She knew when she liked a young man and when she didn't, and she valued her own judgment as much as anybody else's testimonials.

"You mustn't expect grand living here," she said.

"I was never used to anything but simple living," said he.

"Very well, Mr.——"

"Jeffreys, ma'am."

"Mr. Jeffreys, we'll try how we get on for a month; and after that I can offer you a pound a month besides your board."

"You are very kind," said Jeffreys, to whom the offer

seemed a magnificent one. "I am ready to begin work at once."

"That will do. You'd better begin now. Come this way to the schoolroom."

CHAPTER VI

Galloway House

MY business-like readers have, I dare say, found fault with me for representing a business conference on which so much depended as having taken place on the front doorstep of Galloway House, and without occupying much more than five minutes in the transaction. How did Jeffreys know what sort of person Mrs. Trimble was? She might have been a Fury or a Harpy. Her house might have been badly drained. Mr. Fison might have left her because he couldn't get his wages. And what did Mrs. Trimble know about the Bolsover cad? She never even asked for a testimonial. He might be a burglar in disguise, or a murderer, or a child-eater. And yet these two foolish people struck a bargain with one another five minutes after their first introduction, and before even the potatoes which Mrs. Trimble had left on her plate when she went to the door had had time to get cold.

I am just as much surprised as the reader at their rashness, which I can only account for by supposing that they were both what the reader would call "hard up." Jeffreys, as we know, was very hard up; and as for Mrs. Trimble, the amount of worry she had endured since Mr. Fison had left was beyond all words. She had had to teach as well as manage, the thing she never liked. And her son and assistant, without a second usher to keep him steady, had been turning her hair grey. For three weeks she had waited in vain. Several promising-looking young men had come and looked at the place and then gone away. She had not been able to

enjoy an afternoon's nap for a month. In short, she was getting worn out. When, therefore, Jeffreys came and asked for the post, she had to put a check on herself to prevent herself from "jumping down his throat." Hence the rapid conference at the hall door, and the ease with which Jeffreys got his footing in Galloway House.

"Come and have a bite of mutton," said Mrs. Trimble, leading the way into the parlour. "Jonah and I are just having dinner."

Jonah, who, if truth must be told, had been neglecting his inner man during the last five minutes in order to peep through the crack of the door, and overhear the conference in the hall between his mother and the stranger, was a vulgar-looking youth of about Jeffrey's age, with a slight cast in his eye, but otherwise not bad-looking. He eyed the new usher as he entered with a mingled expression of suspicion and contempt; and Jeffreys, slow of apprehension though he usually was, knew at a glance that he had not fallen on a bed of roses at Galloway House.

"Jonah, this is Mr. Jeffreys; I've taken him on in Fison's place. My son, Mr. Jeffreys."

Jonah made a face at his mother, as much as to say, "I don't admire your choice," and then, with a half-nod at Jeffreys, said,—

"Ah, how are you?"

"Jonah and I always dine at twelve, Mr. Jeffreys," said Mrs. Trimble, over whom the prospect of the afternoon's nap was beginning to cast a balmy sense of ease. "You two young men will be good friends, I hope, and look well after the boys."

"More than you do," said the undutiful Jonah; "they've been doing just as they please the last month."

"It's a pity, Jonah, you never found fault with that before."

"What's the use of finding fault? No end to it when you once begin."

"Well," observed the easy-going matron, "you two will

have to see I don't have occasion to find fault with you."

Jonah laughed, and asked Jeffreys to cut him a slice of bread.

Presently Mrs. Trimble quitted the festive board, and the two ushers were left together.

"Lucky for you," said young Trimble, "you got hold of ma and pinned her down to taking you on on the spot. What's she going to pay you?"

The question did not altogether please the new assistant, but he was anxious not to come across his colleague too early in their acquaintanceship.

"She pays me nothing the first month. After that, if I suit, I'm to have a pound a month."

"If you suit? I suppose you know that depends on whether I like you or not?"

"I hope not," blurted out Jeffreys—"that is," added he, seeing his mistake, "I hope we shall get on well together."

"Depends," said Trimble. "I may as well tell you at once I hate stuckuppedness (this was a compound word worthy of a young schoolmaster). If you're that sort you'd better cry off at once. If you can do your work without giving yourself airs, I shall let you alone."

Jeffreys was strongly tempted after this candid avowal to take the youthful snob's advice and cry off. But the memory of yesterday's miserable experiences restrained him. He therefore replied, with as little contempt as he was able to put into the words,—

"Thanks."

Trimble's quick ear detected the ill-disguised scorn of the reply. "You needn't try on that sort of talk," said he; "I can tell you plump, it won't do. You needn't think because ma took you on for the asking, you're going to turn up your nose at the place!"

"I don't think so," said Jeffreys, struggling hard with himself. "How many boys are there here?"

"Forty-four. Are you anything of a teacher? Can you keep order?"

"I don't know; I haven't tried yet."

"Well, just mind what you're about. Keep your hands off the boys; we don't want manslaughter or anything of that sort here."

Jeffreys started. Was it possible that this was a random shot, or did Trimble know about Bolsover and young Forrester?" The next remark somewhat reassured him.

"They're looking sharp after private schools now; so mind, hands off. There's one o'clock striking. All in! Come along. You'd better take the second class and see what you can make of them. Precious little ma will put her nose in, now you're here to do the work."

He led the way down the passage and across a yard into an outhouse which formed the schoolroom. Here were assembled, as the two ushers entered, some forty boys ranging in age from seven to twelve, mostly, to judge from their dress and manners, of the small shopkeeper and farmer class.

The sound of Trimble's voice produced a dead silence in the room, followed immediately by a movement of wonder as the big, ungainly form of the new assistant appeared. Jeffreys' looks, as he himself knew, were not prepossessing, and the juvenile population of Galloway House took no pains to conceal the fact that they agreed with him.

"Gordon," said Trimble, addressing a small boy who had been standing up when they entered, "what are you doing?"

"Nothing, sir."

"You've no business to be doing nothing! Stand upon that form for an hour!"

The boy obeyed, and Trimble looked round at Jeffreys with a glance of patronizing complacency.

"That's the proper way to do with them," said he. "Plenty of ways of taking it out of them without knocking them about."

Jeffreys made no reply; he felt rather sorry for the weak-kneed little youngster perched up on that form, and wondered if Mr. Trimble would expect him (Jeffreys) to adopt his method of "taking it out" of his new pupils.

Just then he caught sight of the familiar face of Master

Freddy, one of his friends of the morning, who was standing devouring him with his eyes as if he had been a ghost. Jeffreys walked across the room and shook hands with him.

"Well, Freddy, how are you? How's Teddy?"

"I say," said Trimble, in by no means an amiable voice, as he returned from this little excursion, "what on earth are you up to? What did you go and do that for?"

"I know Freddy."

"Oh, do you? Freddy Rosher, you're talking. What do you mean by it?"

"Please, sir, I didn't 'mean——"

"Then stay in an hour after school, and write four pages of your copy-book."

It took all Jeffreys' resolution to stand by and listen to this vindictive sentence without a protest. But he restrained himself, and resolved that Freddy should find before long that all his masters were not against him.

"That's your fault," said Trimble, noticing the dissatisfied look of his colleague. "How are we to keep order if you go and make the boys break rules? Now you'd better get to work. Take the second class over there and give them their English history. James II. they're at. Now, you boys, first class, come up to me with your sums. Second class, take your history up to Mr. Jeffreys. Come along; look alive!"

Jeffreys thereupon found himself mobbed by a troop of twenty of the youngest of the boys, and haled away to a desk at the far end of the room, round which they congregated book in hand, and waited for him to commence operations.

It was an embarrassing situation for the new usher. He had never been so fixed before. He had often had a crowd of small boys round him, tormenting him and provoking him to anger; but to be perched up here at a desk, with twenty tender youths hanging on the first word which should fall from his lips, was to say the least, a novel experience. He glanced up towards the far end of the room, in the hopes of being able to catch a hint from the practised Jonah as to how to proceed. But he found Jonah was looking at him sus-

piciously over the top of his book, and that was no assistance whatever. The boys evidently enjoyed his perplexity; and, emboldened by his recent act of friendliness to the unlucky Freddy, regarded him benevolently.

"Will some one lend me a book?" at last said Jeffreys, half desperate.

A friendly titter followed this request.

"Don't you know it without the book?" asked one innocent, handing up a book.

"I hope you do," said Jeffreys, blushing very much as he took it. "Now," added he, turning to the reign of James II., "can any one tell we what year King James II. came to the throne?"

"Please, sir, that's not the way," interposed another irreverent youngster, with a giggle. "You've got to read it first, and then ask us."

Jeffreys blushed again.

"Is that the way?" said he. "Very well. James II. succeeded his brother Charles in 1685. One of his first acts on coming——"

"Oh, we're long past that," said two or three of his delighted audience at a breath; "we've done to where Monmouth's head was cut off."

This was very uncomfortable for the new master. He coloured up, as if he had been guilty of a scandalous misdemeanour, and fumbled nervously with the book, positively dreading to make a fresh attempt. At last, however, he summoned up courage.

"The death of this ill-fated nobleman was followed by a still more terrible measure of retribution against those who had——"

"Please, sir, we can't do such long words; we don't know what that means. You've got to say it in easy words, not what's put in the book."

Jeffreys felt that all the sins of his youth were rising up against him that moment. Nothing that he had ever done seemed just then as bad as this latest delinquency.

"After Monmouth's death they made it very—(hot, he was going to say, but he pulled himself up in time), they made it very (whatever was the word ?)—very awkward for those who had helped him. A cruel judge named Jeffreys——"

That was a finishing stroke! The reader could have sunk through the floor as he saw the sensation which this denunciation of himself caused among his audience. There was not a shadow of doubt in the face of any one of them as to his identity with the ferocious judge in question. What followed he felt was being listened to as a chapter of autobiography, and nothing he could say could now clear his character of the awful stain that rested upon it.

"A cruel judge condemned more than three hundred persons——"

"You forgot to say his name, please, sir," they put in.

"Never mind his name; that is, I told you once, you should remember," stammered the hapless usher.

"I remember it. Jeffreys, wasn't it, Mr. Jeffreys?" said one boy triumphantly.

"He condemned more than——"

"Who, Jeffreys?"

What was the use of keeping it up?

"Yes; this wicked judge, Jeffreys, condemned more than three hundred people to death, just because they had helped Monmouth."

There was a low whistle of horror, as every eye transfixed the speaker.

"Did he repent?" asked one.

"It doesn't say so," said the wretched Jeffreys, turning over to the next page in a miserable attempt to appear as if he was not involved in the inquiry.

"How dreadful!" said another.

"Besides this, 849 people were transported."

"By Jeffreys, sir?"

"Yes," replied the owner of the name, finally throwing off all disguise and giving himself up to his fate, "by this wicked Jeffreys."

"Yes, sir; and what else did he do?"

Trimble, as he looked every now and then down the room, was astonished to notice the quiet which prevailed in the lower class, and the interest with which every boy was listening to the new master.

He did not like it. He couldn't manage to interest his class, and it didn't please him at all that this casual new-comer should come and cut him out before his face.

After a while he walked down the room and approached the assistant's desk.

He was convinced this unwonted order could not result from any legitimate cause.

"You don't seem to be doing much work here, I must say," said he. "Give me the book, Mr. Jeffreys: I want to see what they know of the lesson. Where's the place?"

Jeffreys handed the book, putting his finger on the place.

Trimble glanced through a paragraph or two, and then pointing to a boy, one of the least sharp in the class, said,—

"Now, Walker, what happened after Monmouth's death?"

"Oh, if you please, sir, a cruel judge, called Jeffreys, condemned——"

"That will do. You, Rosher, how many people did he condemn to death?"

"More than three hundred, sir," answered Freddy promptly.

"What for, Bacon?"

"Because they helped Monmouth."

Trimble felt perplexed. He never had a class that answered like this. He tried once more.

"Pridger, what else did he do?"

"He had 849 transported, sir."

Trimble shut the book. It was beyond him. If Pridger had said 848 or 850, he could have made something of it. But it floored him completely to find the second class knowing the exact number of convicts in one given year of English history.

"Don't let me catch any of you wasting your time," he said. "Farrar, what do you mean by looking about you, sir? Stand on the form for half an hour."

" Farrar has been very quiet and attentive all the afternoon," said Jeffreys.

" Stand on the form an hour, Farrar," said Trimble, with a scowl.

Jeffreys' brow darkened as he watched the little tyrant strut off to his class. How long would he be able to keep hands off him ?

The rest of the afternoon passed uneventfully. An unconscious bond of sympathy had arisen between the new master and his pupils. His historical importance invested him with a glamour which was nearly heroic ; and his kind word on Farrar's behalf had won him an amount of confidence which was quick in showing itself. " We like you better than Fison, though he was nice," said Bacon, as the class was about to separate.

" I hope Trimble won't send you away," said another.

" I wish you'd condemn young Trimble to death, or transport him, Mr. Jeffreys," said a third confidentially.

" Good-bye, Mr. Jeffreys," said Freddy, with all the confidence of an old friend. " Did you like that parliament cake ? "

" Awfully," said Jeffreys. " Good-bye."

Every one insisted on shaking hands with him, greatly to his embarrassment ; and a few minutes later the school was scattered, and Jeffreys was left to go over in his mind his first day's experience.

On the whole he was cheerful. His heart warmed to these simple little fellows, who thought none the worse of him for being ugly and clumsy. With Mrs. Trimble, too, he anticipated not much difficulty. Young Trimble was a rock ahead undoubtedly, but Jeffreys would stand him as long as he could, and not anticipate the day, which he felt to be inevitable, when he would be able to stand him no longer.

" Well, Mr. Jeffreys," said Mrs. Trimble, as the dame and her two assistants sat down to tea, " how do you manage ? "

" Pretty well, thank you, ma'am," replied Jeffreys ; " they

are a nice lot of little boys, and I found them very good and quiet."

"Of course you would, if you let them do as they like," said Jonah. "You'll have to keep them in, I can tell you, if you expect to keep order."

It did occur to Jeffreys that if they were good without being kept in, Jonah ought to be satisfied, ; but he was too wise to embark on a discussion with his colleague, and confined his attentions to Mrs. Trimble.

The meal being ended, he said—

"Will you excuse me, ma'am, if I go into the city for about an hour? I have to call at the post-office for letters."

"Look here," said Jonah, "we don't let our assistants out any time they like. It's not usual. They ought to stay here. There's plenty of work to do here."

"It's very important for me to get the letters, Mrs. Trimble," said Jeffreys.

"Well, of course, this once," said the matron, glancing uneasily at her son; "but, as Jonah says, we like our young men to stay in, especially at night. We parted with Mr. Fison because he was not steady."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Jeffreys; "if the letters have come to-day I shall not have to trouble you again. Can I do anything for you in town?"

"That chap won't do," said Jonah to his mother when at last Jeffreys started on his expedition.

"I think he will; he means well. It wouldn't do, Jonah," said the good lady, "to have all the trouble again of finding a young man. I think Mr. Jeffreys will do."

"I don't," said Jonah sulkily, taking up a newspaper.

Jeffreys meanwhile, in a strange frame of mind, hurried down to the post-office. The day's adventures seemed like a dream to him as he walked along, and poor Forrester seemed the only reality of his life.

Would there be a letter? And what news would it bring him? During the last twelve hours a new hope and object in life had opened before him. But what was it worth, if, after

all, at this very moment Forrester should be lying lifeless at Bolsover?

"Have you any letter for John Jeffreys?" he asked; but his heart beat so loud that he scarcely heard his own voice.

The man, humming cheerily to himself, took a batch of letters out of a pigeon-hole and began to turn them over. Jeffreys watched him feverishly, and marvelled at his indifference.

"What name did you say—Jones?"

"No, Jeffreys—John Jeffreys."

Again he turned over the bundle, almost carelessly. At length he extracted a letter, which he tossed on to the counter.

"There you are, my beauty," said he.

Jeffreys, heeding nothing except that it was addressed in Mr. Frampton's hand, seized the missive and hastened from the office.

At the first shop window he stood and tore it open.

"MY DEAR JEFFREYS,—I was glad to hear from you, although your letter gave me great pain. It would have been wiser in you to return here, whatever your circumstances might be; wiser still would it have been had you never run away. But I do not write now to reproach you. You have suffered enough, I know. I write to tell you of Forrester."

Jeffreys gave a gasp for breath before he dare read on.

"The poor fellow has made a temporary rally, but the doctors by no means consider him out of danger. Should he recover, which I fear is hardly probable, I grieve to say the injuries he has received would leave him a cripple for life. There is an injury to the spine and partial paralysis, which, at the best, would necessitate his lying constantly on his back, and thus being dependent entirely on others. If he can bear it, he is to be removed to his home in a day or two. He has asked about you, and on my telling him that I was writing to you, said, 'Tell him I know it was only an accident.' I am sure that this letter will grieve you; I wish I could say anything which will help you. May God in His mercy bring good

to us all out of this sorrow! As for yourself, I hope that your guardian's resentment will be short-lived, and that you will let me hear of your welfare. Count on me as a friend, in spite of all.

"Yours always,
"T. FRAMPTON."

"In spite of all!" groaned poor Jeffreys, as he crushed the letter into his pocket. "Will no one have pity on me?"

CHAPTER VII

What a day for Jonah!

THE six months which followed Jeffreys' introduction into the classical atmosphere of Galloway House passed uneventfully for him, and not altogether unpleasantly. He had, it is true, the vision of young Forrester always in his mind, to drag him down, whenever he dwelt upon it, into the bitterest dejection; and he had the active spite and insolence of Jonah Trimble daily to try his temper and tax his patience.

Otherwise he was comfortable. Mrs. Trimble, finding him steady and quiet, treated him kindly when she had her own way, and indifferently when her son was with her. The boys of the second class maintained the mysterious respect they had conceived for him on the day of his arrival, and gave him wonderfully little trouble or difficulty.

He had his evenings for the most part to himself, and even succeeded, after something like a battle-royal with the Trimbles, in carrying his point of having one "evening out" in the week. It nearly cost him his situation, and it nearly cost Jonah a bone-shaking before the question was settled. But Jeffreys could be stubborn when he chose, and stood out grimly on this point. Had it not been for this weekly respite, Galloway House would have become intolerable before a month was over.

He heard occasionally from Mr. Frampton; but the one question which would have interested him most was generally passed over. Mr. Frampton probably considered that any reference to Forrester would be painful to his correspondent,

and therefore avoided it. At last, however, in reply to Jeffreys' entreaty to know where the boy was and how he was progressing, the head-master wrote:—

"I really cannot tell you what you want to know about Forrester, as I have heard nothing of him. His father, as you know, is an officer in India, and his only relative in England was his grandmother, to whose house at Grangerham he was removed on leaving here. The last I heard was a month after he had left here, when he was reported still to be lingering. His grandmother, so I heard, was very ill. He himself, as a last hope, was to be removed to a hospital (I could not hear which) to receive special treatment. Since then—which is five months ago—I have heard nothing, and my last letter to Grangerham was returned by the Dead-Letter Office. I wish I could tell you more. You may depend on my doing so should I hear of him again," etc.

It is hardly to be wondered at after this that poor Jeffreys felt the weight upon him heavier than ever. As long as he had known where Forrester was, and had the hope of hearing from time to time how he fared, he had been able to buoy himself up with the hope of some day making up to his victim for the injury he had inflicted; but when, suddenly, Forrester dropped hopelessly out of his life, the burden of his conscience grew intolerable.

He struggled hard, by devoting himself to his boys and by hard private study in his leisure hours, to drive the haunting memory away, but the effort succeeded only for a time. At night, as he lay in bed, unable to escape from himself, the vision of that pale face and that cry of terror hardly once left him till merciful sleep came to his rescue. And by day, when his small pupils vexed him, or the spiteful Jonah tempted him to revenge, the thought of Forrester cowed him into submission, and left him no choice but to endure what seemed to be his penance.

"Ma," said Mrs. Trimble's hopeful, one afternoon after school had closed, "you've been nicely taken in over that Jeffreys, I can tell you."

"What!" said the lady. "He doesn't drink, does he?"

"Don't know. But there's something queer about him, and I mean to find it out. I'm not going to let it go on, I can tell you."

"Why, what's he been doing, Jonah?"

"Doing? You must go about with your eyes shut if you don't see he's been sulking ever since he came here. I tell you there's something wrong."

"Oh, don't say that, Jonah."

"You never took a character with him, did you?"

"No; he hadn't been in a place before."

"Depend on it, ma, he's skulking. He's done something, and finds this a convenient place to hide away in."

"But, Jonah, he's never shown any signs of not being all right. He's very kind to the boys, and keeps them in wonderful order, better than you do almost."

Jonah did not like this, because he knew it was true. His boys were neither fond of him nor obedient to his control, and the fact that Jeffreys' boys were both was additional proof that there was something wrong.

"Do you suppose he can't manage to take you in, ma? Of course, any one could."

"But he makes himself very pleasant, and studies, and keeps very quiet out of school."

"Of course. Isn't that what I tell you? He's hiding. What do you suppose he skulks away into town for once a week—eh?"

"Not to drink, I do hope?" said the lady.

"Whatever it is, I mean to get to the bottom of it, for the sake of the school," said Jonah. "Fancy the mess we'd get into if it got known we had a shady character here as a teacher!"

"But, Jonah, dear, it's only suspicion. He may be all right."

"Oh, anything *may* be," retorted the philosophic Jonah. "The thing is—is it?"

As Mrs. Trimble was unable to answer this question, she

retired from the discussion, and hoped devoutly nothing was going to happen which would necessitate her doing more work about the school than she at present did.

The unconscious Jeffreys meanwhile was upstairs, washing himself before starting for his weekly " evening out." He had more than usual before him on this particular evening, as, besides calling at the post-office—an errand he never missed—he had discovered another old bookshop across the river which kept open till seven o'clock. And after that he had promised Freddy and Teddy, with whom from the first he had kept up a warm friendship, to call up at their house and help them mend their tricycle. With this full programme before him, he lost no time in starting on his travels ; little dreaming that the quick pace at which he strode along gave unwonted exercise to Mr. Jonah Trimble, who, animated by an amiable curiosity, dogged his footsteps at a respectful distance.

It was about five o'clock when Jeffreys reached the post-office. The clerk knew him by this time, and this evening handed him a letter without being asked. It was a short friendly line from Mr. Frampton with no news—at any rate about Forrester ; and Trimble, as he watched him emerge from the office, letter in hand, and haggard in face, chalked down in in his own mind a first clue as to the mystery that was exercising him.

From the post-office Jeffreys strolled leisurely down the streets toward the bridge, stopping to look into some of the shops by the way, and occasionally making Trimble's heart jump by looking behind him.

In due time he pulled up at the bookseller's shop. Trimble saw the proprietor welcome his visitor with a nod which bespoke an acquaintance of some standing. He saw Jeffreys turning over the contents of some of the trays, taking up a book now and then and examining it, and sometimes propping himself up against the doorpost and reading page after page. It was not very entertaining work for the spy ; but curiosity is patient, and Jonah as he watched the unconscious reader at a safe distance fortified himself by the con-

viction that he was watching the working-out of some deep-laid plot.

Presently he saw Jeffreys disappear into the shop, and what was his amazement, when presently he "casually" passed the door, to see him seated with the bookseller at a table earnestly poring over and discussing a small faded sheet of paper which lay between them! Trimble would have given worlds to know what the mysterious document was, and what villainy was brewing. Had he known it, he might not have stood out there in the evening air quite as patiently as he did. For the mysterious document happened to be nothing but an old tattered and torn Commonwealth tract which Jeffreys had discovered folded up between the leaves of an ancient volume of poetry, and which he and his friend the bookseller were spending a very agreeable half-hour in piecing together and deciphering.

About seven o'clock Jeffreys rose to go, pocketing the precious relic, which his friend had given him; and Trimble, having carefully noted down the name of the shop and the personal appearance of the suspicious bookseller, followed gingerly back across the bridge. The streets were getting less crowded, and Jonah had increasing difficulty in keeping himself concealed as he crawled along on the opposite side of the way some thirty or forty yards in the rear of his man.

Just as Jeffreys was crossing the space opposite the grand front of the minster a dog sprang forward to meet him with every token of joy. It was Julius, and Jeffreys knew that the master could not be very far away. He turned round for a moment, as though he meditated flight, and gave Jonah a spasm by the unexpected movement. But before he could decide Mr. Halgrove strolled pleasantly round the corner, and nodded to him as if he and his ward had not parted five minutes before.

"Ah, John, fine evening for a stroll. On your way home?"

Mr. Halgrove till that moment had not had the faintest idea that his ward was still in York.

"No," said Jeffreys, patting the dog's head and looking very much the reverse of comfortable.

"They say the front of the minster is beginning to crumble at places," said Mr. Halgrove, looking up at the noble pile before them; "I hope it's not true. Are you much here?"

"No. I live in another part of the town."

"Very odd my meeting you," said Mr. Halgrove. "I was thinking of you only to-day. I had a letter from Mr. Frampton."

"Indeed, sir—about Forrester?"

"About—oh, your little victim? Oddly enough, it was not. It was to remind me that your last half-term's fees were not paid. Don't you think it would be judicious to clear up this little score? Looks bad, you know—to run away with score against you."

Jeffrey's face turned pale. He had at least supposed that up to the time of his expulsion from his guardian's house Mr. Halgrove would have considered himself responsible for his maintenance.

"I never dreamt," he faltered. "How much is it?"

"Quite a little sum, isn't it? Come, you were last at school. Too bad to pose me with compound division at my time of life. Half a term at £40 a year?"

"Seven pounds!" gasped Jeffreys.

"Not quite, £6 13*s*. 4*d*. Fancy my being better at mental arithemetic than you!"

"I haven't got any money. I only get a pound a month and my board."

"My dear boy, I congratulate you. Twelve pounds a year! Now, wasn't it a pity you didn't take that £5 note I offered you? Suppose you take it now!"

Mr. Halgrove put his hand to his pocket and took out his purse.

"No!" exclaimed Jeffreys, in a tone that made Trimble, who was busy engaged in inspecting the architecture of the minster from behind a deep buttress close to the speaker, jump—"I'd sooner die!"

"Don't do that, my dear fellow, don't do that," said Mr. Halgrove, with a smile which belied the anger he felt at the refusal; "rather than that I'll keep the money. I have no wish to commit a murder. It's not in my line. That's one point in which you and I differ, isn't it?"

Jeffreys made as though he would spring upon him. What was it checked him? Was it the solemn minster—was it a dread of his guardian's superior strength—was it fear of punishment? Or was it a momentary glimpse of a pale face in a moonlit room far away, which took the spirit out of him and made his arm drop at his side?

"Well, I won't keep you," said Mr. Halgrove, who had also for a moment looked uneasy. "I dare say you are in a hurry like myself. The fact is, I am going a trip to America next week and have a good deal to attend to. That makes me doubly glad to have met you. Good-bye, my dear boy, good-bye. Come, Julius."

Julius as he slunk off at his master's heels, and heard the smothered oath which escaped Mr. Halgrove's lips as soon as he found himself alone, looked round wistfully and pitifully, and wished he were allowed to go where he pleased.

Jeffreys walked on like a man in a dream. For six months he had been working out what had been to him a penance, hoping to live down his bad name, even if he could never win a good.

But now in a moment it seemed as if the labour of those patient months had been dashed to the ground, and his guardian's bitter words branded themselves on his heart as he paced on out of the shadow of the noble minster into the dusk of the city.

Trimble, nearly bursting with excitement—for he had overheard all the latter part of the conversation—crept after him. What a time he was having!

Jeffreys bent his steps almost aimlessly out of the city into the country beyond. It was only half-past seven, and Teddy and Freddy were expecting him. He had not the heart to fail them, though he would gladly have remained solitary that

evening. The Roshers lived in a small cottage some distance down the lane in which six months ago Jeffreys had first encountered the sunshine of their presence. How long ago it seemed now! Ah! that was the very bank on which he sat; and there beyond was the railway embankment at which the navvies were working, now finished and with the grass growing up its sides.

Trimble's little heart jumped to his mouth as he saw the man he was following stop abruptly and begin to climb the bank. He was too close behind to be able to turn back. All he could do was to crouch down in the ditch and "lie low." He heard Jeffreys as he gained the top of the bank sigh wearily; then he seemed to be moving as if in search of a particular spot; and then the lurker's hair stood on end as he heard the words, hoarsely spoken,—

"It was this very place."

What a day Jonah was having!

After a quarter of an hour's pause, during which the patient Jonah got nearly soaked to the skin in his watery hiding-place, Jeffreys roused himself and descended into the lane. Any one less abstracted could not have failed to detect the scared face of the spy shining out like a white rag from the hedge. But Jeffreys heeded nothing and strode on to Ash Cottage.

Long before he got there, Freddy and Teddy, who had been on the look-out for him for an hour, scampered down to meet him.

"Hurrah, Jeff!" shouted Teddy (I grieve to say that these irreverent brethren had long ago fallen into the scandalous habit of calling their teacher by a familiar contraction of his proper name, nor had the master rebuked them). "Hurrah, Jeff! we were afraid you weren't coming."

"The tricycle won't go," said Freddy; "we've pulled it all to bits, and tried to make it right with a hammer, but it's very bad."

"It's glorious you've come to do it. Isn't Jeff a brick, Teddy?"

"Rather—and, oh, did you bring any oil? We used all ours up."

"We've got a screw-driver, though!" said Freddy.

"And lots of string!" shouted Teddy.

"You *are* a brick to come and do it," shouted both.

Where in the world is there a tonic equal to the laugh of a light-hearted grateful little boy? How could Jeffreys help forgetting his trouble for a time and devoting himself heart and soul to the business of that tricycle? Trimble, as he dodged along after them perplexed and puffing, could hardly believe his eyes as he saw his morose colleague suddenly throw off the burden that was on him and become gay.

"Come along, little chaps—let's see what we can do," said Jeffreys, as the three strode out to the cottage. "Where is he?"

"In the shed. We've got a candle."

Trimble saw them disappear into the garden, and, guided by their cheery voices, soon discovered the back of the shed in which the momentous surgical operation was to take place. It backed on the road, and might have been built for Trimble's purpose. For the woodwork abounded in most convenient cracks, through which a spy might peep and listen luxuriously. What a day Jonah was having!

The Roshers conducted their friend into the place like anxious relatives who conduct a physician into a sick-chamber. The poor patient lay on the floor in a very bad way. Two wheels were off, the axle was bent, the wire spokes were twisted, the saddle was off, and the brake was all over the place.

Jeffreys shook his head and looked grave.

"It's a bad job," said he.

"You see, we were giving mother a ride on it, and she's too heavy—especially going downhill. She thought we were holding it, but it got away. We yelled to her to put on the brake, but she didn't, and it went bang into the wall."

"And your mother?" inquired Jeffreys, somewhat anxiously.

"Oh, her face is much better now. The doctor says there'll be hardly any marks left after all."

It was a long business putting the unlucky tricycle in order. Jeffreys was not a mechanic. All he could do was to put the parts together in a makeshift way, and by straightening some of the bent parts and greasing some of the stiff parts restore the iron horse into a gloomy semblance of his old self.

The boys were as grateful and delighted as if he had constructed a new machine out of space; and when at last a trial trip demonstrated that at any rate the wheels would go round and the saddle would carry them, their hearts overflowed.

"You are a real brick, Jeff," said Teddy; "I wish I could give you a hundred pounds!"

"I don't want a hundred pounds," said Jeffreys, with a smile; "if you and Freddy and I are good friends, that's worth a lot more to me."

"Why?" demanded Freddy; "are we the only friends you've got?"

Jeffreys looked out of the window and said,—

"Not quite—I've got one more."

"Who—God?" asked the boy naturally.

Poor Jeffreys! He sometimes forgot that Friend, and it startled and humbled him to hear the little fellow's simple question.

"Of course, he's got Him," interposed Teddy, without giving him time to reply. "But who else, Jeff?"

"I saw him not long ago," said Jeffreys. "His name's Julius."

"You don't like him more than us, do you?" asked Teddy rather anxiously.

"Not a quarter as much, old chap," said Jeffreys.

There was a pause, during which Trimble chuckled to think how little the speaker guessed into whose ears he was betraying the name of his villainous accomplice!

Presently, however, he started to hear the sound of his own name.

"Jeff," said Teddy, "isn't Mr. Trimble a beast?"

"Let's talk about something pleasant," suggested Jeffreys, by way of begging the question.

"Let's talk about hanging him; that would be pleasant," said Teddy.

"Would you be sorry if he was dead?" demanded Teddy, in his matter-of-fact way. "I say, Jeff, wouldn't it be jolly if we could kill everybody we hated?"

"Wouldn't it be jolly if every little boy who talked like a little donkey were to have his ears boxed?" said Jeffreys.

"I wish he'd been on the tricycle instead of mother," continued Teddy, with a sigh of content at the bare idea.

"Teddy, you are not as nice a little boy as I thought when you talk like that," said Jeffreys. "Come and let's have one more turn on the machine, and then I must hurry back, or Mrs. Trimble will think I'm lost."

Jeffreys got back to Galloway House about ten o'clock, and found Jonah sitting up for him.

"So you *have* come back," said that individual pompously. "I hope you've enjoyed your evening out."

"Yes," said Jeffreys, "pretty well."

"Oh!" said Jonah to himself, as he went up to bed, bursting with excitement. "If he only knew what I know! Let me see——"

And then he went over in his mind the events of that wonderful evening, the visit to the post-office and the horrified look as he came out letter in hand; the mysterious conference with the bookseller, doubtless over this very letter. And how artfully he had been pretending to look at the books outside till he saw no one was looking! Then the secret meeting with his accomplice in the minster yard—Mr. Julius, yes, that was the name he had himself told the boys—and the altercation over the money, doubtless the booty of their crime, and Mr. Julius's denunciation of Jeffreys as a murderer! Whew! Then that lonely country walk, and that search on the bank, and that exclamation, "It was this very place!" Whew! Jonah had tied a bit of his bootlace on the hedge just under the spot, and could find it again within a foot. Then the rencontre with the two boys and the strange, enigmatical talk in the shed, pointing to the plot of a new

crime of which he—Trimble—was to be the victim. Ha, ha! —and the business over that tricycle too, in the candle-light. Jonah could see through that. He could put a spoke in a wheel as well as Jeffreys.

Two things were plain. He must get hold of the letter; and he must visit the scene of the crime *with a spade!* Then—

Jonah sat up half the night thinking of it, till at last the deep breathing of his colleague in the next room reminded him that now at any rate was the time to get the letter. He had seen Jeffreys crush it into his side pocket after leaving the bookseller's and he had heard him before getting into bed just now hang his coat on the peg behind the door. And it was hot, and the door was open.

What a day Jonah was having!

Fortune favours the brave. It was a work of two minutes only. The pocket was there at his hand before he had so much as put a foot in the room. And there was the letter—two letters—and not a board creaked or a footstep sounded before he was safe back in his own room with the documentary evidence before him.

There was only one letter after all. The other paper was a rubbishing rigmarole about General Monk and the Parliament 1660. This Jonah tossed contemptuously into the grate. But the other letter, how his flesh crept as he read it! It had no date, and was signed only in initials.

"Dear J. There is no news. I can understand your trouble and remorse, and this uncertainty makes it all the more terrible to you. I know it is vain to say to you, 'Forget,' but do not write about poor Forrester's blood being on your head! Your duty is to live and redeem the past. Let the dead bury their dead, dear fellow, and turn your eyes forward, like a brave man. Yours ever, J. F."

Do you wonder if Jonah's blood curdled in his veins—"remorse," "uncertainty," "poor Forrester," "his blood on your head," eh? "bury your dead"!

Whew! *What* a day Jonah had had, to be sure!

CHAPTER VIII

I Know a Bank

JONAH TRIMBLE may not have been a genius of the first water, but he was at least wise enough to know that he could not both have his cake and eat it. His discovery of Jeffreys' villainy was a most appetising cake, and it wanted some little self-denial to keep his own counsel about it, and not spoil sport by springing his mine until all the trains were laid.

Another consideration, moreover, which prevented his taking immediate action was that Jeffreys was extremely useful at Galloway House, and could not be spared just yet—even to the gallows. In a few months' time, when the good name of the school, which had rapidly risen since he came upon the scene, was well established, things might be brought to a climax. Meanwhile Jonah Trimble would keep his eye on his man, read his *Eugene Aram*, and follow up his clues.

Jeffreys awoke on the following morning with a feeling of oppression on his mind which for a little time he could not define. It was not his guardian's words, bitter as they had been; it was not the insolence of his fellow-usher, intolerable as that was becoming. When at last his wandering thoughts came in and gave the trouble shape, he found it took a much more practical form. He was in debt seven pounds to Mr. Frampton. It never occurred to him to wonder whether Mr. Halgrove had been telling him the truth or not, nor to his unbusinesslike mind did it occur that his guardian, as the

trustee responsible for what money he once had, was liable for the debt, however much he might like to repudiate it.

No; all he knew was that Mr. Frampton was owed seven pounds, and that he himself had nothing, or next to nothing, to pay. By hard saving during the six months he had managed to save a sovereign, but of this only last week he had spent the greater part in boots and clothing. Now his worldly wealth consisted of four shillings!

He was down early that morning, and was relieved to find that Mrs. Trimble was in the parlour alone, without her son. The good lady was in an amiable mood. The school was getting on, and something told her that it was not greatly due either to her own exertions or the influence of Jonah. Therefore, being a mathematical old lady, she subtracted herself and Jonah from the present school staff, and came to the conclusion that Jeffreys must have had a hand in the improvement.

"Young man," said she, in reply to her assistant's greeting, "you've been with me six months. Are you comfortable?"

"Pretty well," said Jeffreys. "I'm very fond of my boys, and I always get on comfortably with you."

The mathematical dame once more went to work, and answered, "You and Jonah don't hit it, I suppose. You don't know Jonah, young man. He may not be easily satisfied, but he's a gentleman."

"I'm sure," said Jeffreys, to whom this tribute seemed the last he should expect to hear bestowed on his amiable fellow-usher, "I try to get on with him, and shall go on trying."

"That's right," said Mrs. Trimble, once more shuddering at the prospect of being left short-handed. "What I was going to say to you was, that now you've been here six months, and are not a forward young man, and don't drink, I shall raise your wages, and give you thirty shillings a month instead of twenty. How will that suit you?"

"You are very kind," said the grateful Jeffreys, with a tremble in his voice which quite moved the old lady's heart; "it will be very acceptable."

"Very good. You need not mention it to Jonah," added she hurriedly, as that young gentleman's footsteps were heard that moment on the stairs.

The only difference which the unconscious Jeffreys was aware of in the conduct of Jonah Trimble towards himself was that the young gentleman was a trifle more hectoring and a trifle more facetious than before.

But even to the little mind of Jonah Trimble it had been revealed that at present it would be extremely awkward for Galloway House if Jeffreys went "on strike." He was a good teacher and manager; and his boys were devoted to him. Of course, when a boy goes home from school full of the praises of his teacher, his parents are pleased too, and think well of the school, and tell their friends what a nice place it is for boys, and so on. It is a good advertisement, in fact. Besides, with Mrs. Trimble so lazy, and Jonah himself so unattractive, it would involve a great deal of trouble all round if Jeffreys deserted it. They knew by experience that young fellows of good education did not as a rule jump at the situation of second usher in Galloway House. And they knew, also, something of the horrors of a prolonged vacancy in their staff.

Jonah was rather relieved when Jeffreys, immediately after school, shut himself up in his own room, and remained there studying for the rest of the evening. The proceeding favoured a little idea of his own, which was to revisit the spot where he had tied his bootlace the evening before, and see if an examination of that fatal spot would throw any fresh light on his investigation. Accordingly after tea he sallied forth with a trowel in his coat pocket. It was rather a dismal expedition, for it rained, and there was a cool breeze. The lane was muddy even in the roadway, and on the banks it was a quagmire. Still Jonah was too full of his mystery seriously to mind the weather.

He trudged up and down the lane, sharply scrutinizing the hedge for his bootlace. For a long time his perseverance was unrewarded. At length, however, his eye detected the

welcome flutter of a bright tag among the leaves, and he recognized the scene of last night's damp sojourn.

He clambered up on to the bank, regardless of his garments, and commenced an anxious scrutiny. The bank itself showed no signs of a "mystery." Even the traces of Jeffreys' visit to it the night before were obliterated by the soaking rain. The field on the other side was equally unsuggestive. Jonah trampled around in circles on the young corn, but never a pistol, or a rusty knife, or a bottle of poison, did he discover.

Yet he had heard the villain say distinctly,—

"This was the very place!"

He scrambled back rather crestfallen on to the bank. It was getting dark, and the rain came down ceaselessly, yet so strong was his certainty that here he should discover the evidence he was looking for, that for another half-hour he plied his trowel diligently. Sometimes when it struck on a stone or the roots of a bramble, he trembled with anticipation; and once, when, groping under a hedge, his hand suddenly encountered a dead rat, his hair literally stood on end.

He began to get nervous and uncomfortable. The night became suddenly dark, and the wind whistled all sorts of weird tunes among the trees. Jonah did not exactly believe in ghosts; still, if there were such things, this was just the night and just the place for the ghost he was looking for to take its walk abroad. He did not like it, and began to wish he was safe at home. The bushes round him began to rustle noisily, and a gate in the field swung to and fro with an almost human groan. He fancied he could descry wandering lights and white gleams in the darkness, and the vague consciousness of something coming nearer and nearer.

At last, with a great effort, he roused himself from his moist seat, and leaped down from the bank into the lane.

The instant his feet touched the road he was conscious of a low growl, and next moment found himself pinned, with his back to the bank, by a furious dog.

His yell of terror had mingled with the wind for a couple of minutes before he became aware of the red glow of a cigar

in front of him, and behind that the dim countenance of the man whose talk with Jeffreys he had overheard the previous evening.

"Oh, Mr. Julius!" he howled; "help me. Call him off; I shall be torn to pieces."

"And pray how come you to know the name of my dog?" said Mr. Halgrove; "eh, my little highwayman?"

"Please, sir, I'm not a highwayman. I was only looking for something on the bank. Oh, Mr. Julius!"

"My dog is not used to be called Mr," replied Mr. Halgrove.

"Oh, I—I thought that was your name," whimpered Jonah, not daring to stir an inch for fear of incurring the resentment of the dog.

"And pray how came you to think my name was Julius?" said Mr. Halgrove, becoming interested.

"Oh!" please sir, wasn't it you that was talking to Jeffreys last night in the minster yard?"

It was too dark for Jonah to see Mr. Halgrove's eyebrows go up at this unexpected question.

"Julius, come in, sir. So you know the gentleman I was speaking to yesterday," said he, coolly. "What did you say his name was?"

"Jeffreys, sir. He's an——"

Jonah pulled up. This man, whatever his name was, was Jeffreys' accomplice. Jonah felt he must not commit himself.

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Halgrove, noticing the abrupt pause.

"I am saying—it's—it's rather a wet night, sir," said Jonah, making a move to walk on.

Mr. Halgrove snapped his fingers to Julius, and next instant the wretched Jonah was pinned again to the bank.

"What did you say he was?" asked Mr. Halgrove, lighting a fusee.

"Oh, please, sir, please call him off. My assistant, sir."

"Oh! your assistant—in what? Highway robbery?"

"No, sir. In teaching a school. Please, sir, call him off."

Mr. Halgrove paid no heed to the entreaty, but proceeded to extract numerous particulars as to his ward's conduct and mode of life at Galloway House.

"So he's taken to minding little boys, has he? and you are his employer? You are aware that you have a treasure of course?"

Even Trimble was not so dense as to miss the sneer with which the inquiry was made. It emboldened him considerably.

"I dislike him; so does ma. We consider him a dangerous character."

Mr. Halgrove laughed.

"What makes you think that?"

"There's a—oh, sir, please call off the dog—mystery about him. He's——"

"Is that the reason you spied on him yesterday?"

"No, sir—that is—" for at that moment Julius growled—"yes, sir. I thought if there was anything wrong it was my duty to the school to know it, sir."

"Exemplary pedagogue! And now you know it? Eh?"

"Well, sir, I have my suspicions."

"No! And what might your suspicions be?"

"Oh, sir," replied the wretched Jonah, feeling like a blue-bottle on a pin, "I believe he's a murderer in hiding. I really do."

"Clever little ferret! You've found that out, have you?"

"I feel no doubt about it," said Jonah, plucking up a little confidence.

"Don't feel any. When and where did the interesting event take place?"

"Oh, you could tell me that better than I can tell you," stammered Trimble.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Halgrove, his eyebrows going up ominously in the dark.

"Of course I shouldn't—that is—I should never dream of getting *you*—into trouble, sir."

Mr. Halgrove took his cigar out of his mouth and stared at the speaker.

" I'd wait till you were safe away in America, sir ; and even then I wouldn't let your name be known, you know, as an accomplice."

Mr. Halgrove put his cigar back into his mouth, and changed his cane from his left hand to his right.

" Fetch him here, Julius," said he, stepping back into the middle of the road.

It was in vain the wretched Jonah howled and called for mercy.

" So you won't let my name be known as an accomplice! How very kind! "

And he gave practical proof of his gratitude by caning Jonah till both were tired.

" Now good-night," said Mr. Halgrove when he had done, " and thank you for a pleasant evening. I dare say Mr. Jeffreys will make up for any little deficiencies on my part if you ask him. Ask him, with my compliments, to show you the little game he played with one of his old schoolfellows. Good-night, Mr. Trimble. Wish him good-night, Julius."

Julius once more pinned his affrighted victim to the bank, and then following at his master's heels, left the bruised and bewildered Jonah to limp home as best he could.

The day he had had yesterday had been nothing in comparison with to-day!

In the school, meanwhile, there was jubilation and thanksgiving over the fact that Jonah had a bad headache. Jeffreys, with the first and second classes merged for the occasion into one, amazed Mrs. Trimble by the order and industry which he commanded.

" The young man's worth his money," said the good lady, with a sigh of relief, for she had counted on losing her nap for that day at least, and was grateful beyond measure to find her fears disappointed.

As for the first class, they got completely spoiled by their

day's change of teacher, and vowed they would all become dunces in order to be put back in the second class.

"I say, Jeff," said Teddy confidentially, as the school was being dismissed, "*is* there any chance of his dying? It's been so ripping to-day without him."

"Hold your tongue, sir," said Jeffreys, in a tone which astonished his bloodthirsty young confidant; "you're old enough to know better than talk like that."

Teddy looked very miserable at this rebuke.

"Don't be in a wax with me, Jeff," he said appealingly. Whatever would I do if you got to hate me?"

Jeffreys was not proof against this, and walked home with his two young friends, beguiling the way with cheery talk, which effectually dispelled the cloud which his passing anger had roused.

On his way back he felt impelled to climb for a moment on the bank at his favourite spot. It amazed him to see the ground all torn up, and to find a trowel lying half bedded in the turf at the top. Still more did it surprise and perplex him to find a penknife, which he recognized at once as belonging to Trimble, and which he distinctly recollected having seen in that hero's hand during school the afternoon of the preceding day. What did it all mean?

CHAPTER IX

A Thunderstorm

IT did not add to Jonah's happiness to see the looks of evident disgust with which the first class greeted his reappearance in the schoolroom. Their pleasant experience yesterday had demoralized them, and they settled down listlessly at Jonah's bidding like voyagers who, after a day in still waters, put out once more to the rough sea. Teddy especially felt the hardships of the mighty deep. Jonah's eye transfixed him all day. If he spoke, if he fidgeted, if he looked about, the hand of the tyrant swooped down upon him.

He spent the greater part of the day standing on the form. The contents of his pockets (including some priceless marbles) were impounded; he had two columns of dates to commit to memory before he could go home; and, hardest of all, because of a little blot, he was reduced to the ineffable humiliation of writing all his exercises on a slate!

It took all the big heart of the little fellow to bear up against this mountain of calamity, and had it not been for an occasional glimpse of Jeffreys' face, turned sympathetically in his direction, his courage might have failed him.

School closed, and still his dates were unlearnt. His legs ached with standing hour after hour on the narrow form, and his head, lifted three feet higher than usual into the heated atmosphere of the room, swam ominously.

Freddy, after waiting about dismally for half an hour, had gone home alone. The voices of boys remaining to play or talk in the yard outside had one after another ceased. Jeffreys

had long since taken himself and his books elsewhere, and only Jonah was left to keep watch over his prisoner.

The boy made a tremendous effort to master the dates, but they went through him like water through a sieve. He could not even keep his eyes on the book, and when he turned them towards the master's desk, Jonah seemed to be half hidden in mist. He edged cautiously to the end of the form nearest the wall, where at least he might get a little support. It was a perilous voyage, for he was two feet away, and scarcely dare move at a greater rate than an inch a minute. He got there at last, nearly done up, and with a sigh of relief leaned his head against the cold plaster.

"Rosher, stand at the other end of the form immediately, and learn twenty more dates for being idle."

Alas poor Teddy! He had held out long, and braved much. But his heart quailed now. He seemed glued to the wall, and the form all of a sudden seemed to contract into a tight-rope over a chasm.

"I'm so tired, sir, I——"

"Silence, sir! and do what you're told," thundered Jonah.

Teddy staggered forward half a step, but shrank back before he had finished it to the friendly wall.

Trimble rose from his seat.

"Do you hear me?" he shouted furiously. "Stand where I tell you."

"Please, sir, I can't. I——"

Here Trimble advanced towards him, and Teddy, fairly unnerved and almost fainting, slipped down from the bench and burst into tears.

"That's it, is it?" said Jonah; "we'll see whether you can or——"

At that instant the door opened, and Jeffreys entered the room.

It did not require the boy's sobbing appeal, "Oh, Jeff, Jeff!" to enable him to take in the situation at a glance. Nor did it need a second glance at the face of the intruder to induce Jonah to turn pale.

Jeffreys advanced without a word to the form, brushing Jonah out of his way with a swing that sent him staggering six paces down the floor, and putting his arm round Teddy, led him without a word from the room.

"Come along, little chap," said he, when they got outside; "come home."

The sound of his voice revived Teddy like a cordial.

"Do you hate me for blubbering?" he asked anxiously; "wasn't it like a baby?"

"How long had you been up there?" asked Jeffreys.

"It was half past one when he stood me up. I had only just been looking round to see where Freddy was; and oh, Jeff, I've got to write on a slate just because of a little blot. What's the time now?"

"Half-past five," said Jeffreys, putting on his hat, and swinging Teddy's satchel over his own arm.

"Are you coming with me Jeff?" asked the boy eagerly.

"Of course you couldn't get home alone."

Great was the content of the little fellow as he left Galloway House with his hand on the strong arm of his tutor. Greater still were his surprise and content when, as soon as the streets were past, Jeffreys took him up on his back and carried him the rest of the way to Ash Cottage.

"Thanks, awfully, old Jeff," said the boy, as they parted at the gate of the cottage. "What makes you so kind to Freddy and me?"

"I'm not good at riddles, Teddy. Good-night," and he went.

Jonah, as he was not surprised to find, was expecting him, in a state of high ferment. Jeffreys would fain have avoided an interview. For he was constantly discovering that he was still far from sure of himself. That afternoon his passion had been within an ace of mastering him; and at any time he dreaded something might happen which would undo all the penance of those last six months. He therefore resolved wisely in the present instance to avoid altercation as far as possible.

"Well, sir, and what have you got to say for yourself? Where have you been?" demanded Jonah, in tones of lofty bitterness.

"I have just taken Rosher home. After standing four hours on the form he wasn't fit to walk himself."

"Oh!" snorted Jonah, nearly bursting with indignation; "and pray how——"

"Excuse me, Trimble. If you and Mrs. Trimble wish me to leave, I'll do so. If not, don't talk to me. I don't want it."

Poor Jonah nearly had a fit. He, head man of Galloway House, knowing what he did, to be spoken to like this by a stuck-up—murderer!

He had prepared a scene, and had counted on coming to an understanding then and there. And lo and behold! before he had well opened his mouth, he had been ordered to shut it by the very being whom he had at his mercy. It passed Jonah's comprehension.

Jeffreys waited a minute to give him a chance of accepting his former alternative. Then, concluding he had decided on the latter, he betook himself to his own room and remained there.

Jonah, as soon as he could recover himself sufficiently to think at all, made up his mind that, come what would, he had had enough of this sort of life. With which conviction he crushed his hat on his head, and sallied forth into the open air.

His feet almost instinctively turned in the direction of Ash Lane; but on this occasion they went past the fatal bank and brought their owner to a halt at the door of Ash Cottage.

"Is Mr. Rosher at home?" inquired he of the servant.

Mr. Rosher was at home—a jovial, well-to-do farmer, with a hearty Yorkshire voice and a good-humoured grin on his broad face.

"Well, lad, what is't?" he asked, as Trimble, hat in hand, was shown into the little parlour. "Man, it's the little schoolmaister."

"Yes, Mr. Rosher," said Trimble; "I should like five minutes' talk with you if you can spare the time."

"Blaze away, lad. A've nothin' else to do."

"I'm rather anxious about your two dear little boys," began Trimble.

"Thee needn't be that; they're tight lads, and learn quite fast enough."

"It's not that, Mr. Rosher, though I hope they do justice to the pains we take with them."

"They nearly killed their mother t'other day on the tricycle," said Mr. Rosher, laughing like a young bull. "Was't thee or t'other young chap came to mend t'auld bone-shaker? Twas a kindly turn to the little fellows, and I'm sorry thee didn't stay to tea, lad."

"We always like to try to make them happy," said Jonah. "Indeed, that is what I came to see you about. I'm sorry to say——"

"Thee's come to tell me why Teddy was blubbering when he got home. Thee'd better tell that to his mother," said the father.

"I'm so sorry to say," pursued Jonah, beginning to wish he was over his task, "my assistant-master is disappointing me. I took him on half in charity six months ago, but lately he has been having a bad influence in the school, and I thought it my duty——"

"Tut, tut! The lads have been cheerier this last six months than ever before——"

"Of course we try all we can to make them happy, and shield them from harm," pursued Trimble, "and I am glad you think we have made school happy for them——"

"And is that all thee's come to say?" said the bewildered parent.

"No, sir. Of course in school I can look after the boys and see they come to no harm; but after school hours of course they are out of my control, and then it is I'm afraid of their coming to mischief. My assistant, I hear, has been in the habit of walking home with them, and from what I know of him he is not a desirable companion for them, and I think it is my duty to put you on your guard, Mr. Rosher. They should

not be encouraged to see too much of him out of doors or bring him to the house."

"It bothers me why you keep the man if he's that sort!" said Mr. Rosher. "What's wrong with him?"

"I'm afraid he's a bad character. I have only discovered it lately, and intend to dismiss him as soon as I get a new assistant."

"What dost mean by a bad character? Is he a thief?"

Trimble looked very grave.

"I wish it was no worse than that."

The farmer's jaw dropped.

"What?" said he. "Dost mean to tell me the man's a murderer?"

Jonah looked terribly shocked.

"It's a dreadful thing to suspect any one," said he, "but it would not be right of me to let things go on without warning you. I shall keep your boys under my own eyes all school-time; and I advise you——"

"I don't want thy advice. Take thyself off!"

Jonah saw that to prolong the interview would only make matters worse. The good father was evidently roused; but whether against him, Jonah, or against Jeffreys, he could scarcely tell. He departed decidedly crestfallen, and more than half repenting of his amiable expedition.

His misgivings were somewhat relieved next morning when Freddy and Teddy put in an appearance punctually at school-time. Jonah considered it expedient under the circumstances not to refer to Teddy's mutinous conduct on the preceding day—a determination which afforded great comfort to that young gentleman and which he put down by a mysterious process of reasoning to Jeffreys' good offices on his behalf.

Jonah, however, on this particular morning felt far from comfortable. It may have been the hot sultry day, or it may have been the general oppression of his own feelings, which gave him a sense of something—probably a thunder-storm impending. His class remarked that he was less

exacting than usual, and even Jeffreys became aware that his colleague for once in a way was not himself.

The clock had just struck twelve, and the boys were beginning to look forward to their usual break in half an hour's time, when the schoolroom door suddenly opened, and disclosed the broad figure of Mr. Rosher, followed at a timid distance by Mrs. Trimble.

Jonah's face turned pale ; Freddy and Teddy opened their eyes to their widest. Jeffreys, on hearing Freddy mutter " Father," looked round curiously, to get a view of the father of his little friends.

Mr. Rosher recognized Trimble with a nod.

" I've coom, you see, lad. I want to have a look at this murderer fellow thee was talking about. Where is he ? "

It was a thunderclap with a vengeance ! Only two persons in the room guessed all it meant.

" Coom, trot him out, man," repeated the farmer, noticing the hesitation in Jonah's scared face. " Is that the chap yonder thee was telling me of ? " added he, pointing to Jeffreys.

It was all up with Galloway House, and Jonah knew it.

" Yes," said he.

Jeffrey's face became livid as he sprang to his feet.

" Stay where thou art," said the brawny farmer, motioning him back. " Let's have a look at thee. So thee's a manslayer ? Thou looks it."

A terrible pause followed—the pause of a man who struggles for words that will not come.

He looked terrible indeed ; with heaving chest and bloodless lips, and eyes like the eyes of a hunted wolf. At length he gasped—

" Liar ! " and advanced towards the affrighted Jonah.

But the sturdy Yorkshireman stepped between.

" Nay, nay," said he, " one's enough. Stay where thou art, and let him give chapter and verse—chapter and verse. He came to me last night, and said thou wast a murderer, and I've coom to see if thou art. Thou looks one, but maybe thou'rt right to call him a liar."

"Ask him," gasped Jonah, "what he did to his old schoolfellow, young Forrester, and then let him call me a liar if he likes."

"Dost hear, lad? What was it thee did to thy old schoolfellow young Forrester? That's a fair question. Out with it."

If Jeffreys had looked terrible a moment ago, he looked still more terrible now, as he sank with a groan on to the bench, and turned a sickened look on his accuser.

The dead silence of the room almost stunned him. He seemed to feel every eye that turned to him like a dagger in his heart, and there rose up in his mind a vision of that football field far away, and the senseless figure of the boy who lay there. Everything came back. The howl of execration, the frightened faces, the cap lying where the boy had flung it, even the chill autumn breeze in his face.

He knew not how long he sat there stupefied. The voice of Mr. Rosher roused him.

"Coom, now, dost thou say liar still?"

Jeffreys struggled to his feet, no longer furious, but still more terrible in his dejection.

"Yes," snapped Jonah, astonished at the effect of his accusation, and just wise enough to see that to add to or take away from the story would be to spoil it. "What did you do to your poor schoolfellow, young Forrester? Do you suppose we don't see through you?"

"Hold thy tongue, little donkey!" said the farmer; "let's hear what he has to say."

For a moment it seemed as if Jeffreys was about to take him at his word, and say something. But his tongue failed him at the critical moment, and he gave it up. He had caught sight of Teddy's eyes fixed on his in mingled misery and terror, and the sight unmanned him.

He moved slowly to the door.

They watched him, spellbound, and in a moment he would have gone, had not Teddy with a big sob made a spring forward and seized him by the arm.

"Oh, Jeff it's a wicked lie; we don't believe it. Freddy, we don't believe it, do we? Father, he's been good to us; he never did anything unkind. Don't have him sent away!"

This appeal fairly broke the spell. Freddy was at his brother's side in an instant, and the rest of the school, had not Mr. Rosher motioned them back, would have followed him.

"Teddy and Freddy, my lads," said the farmer, "go to thy seats like good lads. Let him say yea or nay to what this—little—peacher says."

"Say you didn't, Jeff," implored the boys.

Jeffreys shook his head sadly.

"I can't," he said. "If he's dead——"

"Oh, he's dead," put in Jonah; "*I* can tell you that."

Jeffreys gave one scared look at the speaker, and then hurried from the room.

Mrs. Trimble followed him up to his room.

"I don't believe it all," said she; "you never did it on purpose, you're not so bad as that. I won't believe it even if you tell me," said the good lady, bursting into tears.

Jeffreys put together his few books and garments.

"You're going," said she, "of course. It's no use hoping you won't. Here's two pounds you're owed—and—"

Jeffreys took the money, and kept her hand for a moment in his.

"You are kind," said he hoarsely. "Good-bye, Mrs. Trimble."

He kissed her hand and took up his bundle.

At the foot of the stairs a boy's hand was laid on his arm.

"Oh, Jeff," whispered Teddy—he had stolen out of the schoolroom. "Poor Jeff! I know you aren't wicked. Say good-bye, Jeff. What shall we do? What shall we do?"

"Good-bye, little chap," said Jeffreys, stooping down and kissing the boy's wet cheek.

"But, Jeff, where are you going? When will you—?"

Jeffreys was gone.

In the schoolroom meanwhile the inevitable reaction had taken place.

As the door closed behind Jeffreys, Jonah, hardly knowing what he did, gave vent to a hysterical laugh.

It was the signal for an explosion such as he had little counted on.

"Thou little dirty toad!" said the farmer, rounding on him wrathfully; "what dost mean by that? Hey? For shame!"

"Beast!" shouted Freddy, choking with anger and misery.

"Beast!" echoed the school.

Some one threw a wet sponge across the room, but Mr. Rosher intercepted it.

"Nay, nay, lads; don't waste your clean things on him. Freddy and Teddy, my lads—where's Teddy?—come along home. You've done with Galloway House."

"Why, sir——" expostulated the wretched Jonah.

"Hold thy tongue again," roared the farmer. "Coom away, lads. Thee can take a half-holiday to-day, all of you, and if thy parents ask why, say Farmer Rosher will tell them."

"I'll have you prosecuted," growled Trimble, "for interfering with my——"

"Dost want to be shut up in yon cupboard?" roared the hot-headed farmer. And the hint was quite enough.

Galloway House on that day turned a corner. Farmer Rosher, who had sore doubts in his own mind whether he had done good or harm by his interference, spoke his mind freely to his neighbours on the subject of Jonah Trimble, a proceeding in which his two sons heartily backed him up. The consequence was that that worthy young pedagogue found his scholastic labours materially lightened—for a dozen boys are easier to teach than fifty—and had time to wonder whether after all he would not have served his day and generation quite as well by looking after his own affairs, as after the most unprofitable affairs of somebody else.

CHAPTER X

Tossed About

JEFFREYS, as the reader will have discovered, did not possess the art of doing himself common justice. He had brooded so long and so bitterly over his fatal act of violence at Bolsover, that he had come almost to forget that accident had had anything to do with poor Forrester's injuries. And now, when confronted with his crime, even by a despicable wretch like Trimble, he had not the spirit to hold up his head and make some effort at any rate to clear himself of all that was charged against him.

Jeffreys was still a blunderer, or else his conscience was unusually sensitive. You and I, reader, no doubt, would have put a bold face on the matter, and insisted the whole affair was entirely an accident, and that we were to be pitied rather than blamed for what had happened. And a great many people would have pitied us accordingly. But Jeffreys claimed no pity. He saw nothing but his own ruthless fault; and he chose to take the whole burden of it, and the burden of the accident besides, on his own shoulders.

And so it was he left Galloway House without a word, and cast himself and his bad name once more adrift on a pitiless world.

But as he walked on he was not thinking of Galloway House, or Farmer Rosher, or Freddy or Teddy. The last words of Trimble rang in his ears, and deafened him to all beside.

"He's dead—*I* can tell you that!"

It never occurred to him to wonder whence Jonah had derived his information, or whether it was true or false. Mr. Frampton's letter five months ago had left little hope of the boy's recovery, but not till now had Jeffreys heard any one say, in so many words "He is dead." Jonah apparently knew the whole story. How he had discovered it, it was useless to guess. And yet for a moment Jeffreys was tempted to return and seize his accuser by the throat and demand the truth of him. But he dismissed the notion with a shudder.

His steps turned, half mechanically, half by chance, towards his guardian's house. He had never been in that quarter of York since the night of his expulsion, and he did not know why of all places he should just now turn thither. His guardian, as he well knew, was even more pitiless and cynical than ever, and any hope of finding shelter or rest under his roof he knew to be absurd. He might, however, be out; indeed, he had spoken of going to America, in which case Mrs. Jessop might be there alone.

One clings to the idea of a home; and this place, such as it was, was the only place which for Jeffreys had ever had any pretensions to the blessed name. His expectations—if he had any—vanished as he abruptly turned the corner of the street and stood in front of the house. The shutters on the lower floor were closed, and the windows above were curtainless and begrimed with dust. A notice "To let," stared out from a board beside the front door, and the once cosy little front garden was weed-grown and run to seed.

Jeffreys felt a stronger man as he walked out of York in the deeepening twilight. He was in the way of old associations just now, for almost without knowing it he found himself quitting York by way of Ash Lane, every step of which by this time was familiar—painfully familiar ground. The bank on which he had last found Jonah's knife had now ne attractions for him. Not so a garden shed, by the back of which he passed, and whence proceeded the glimmer of a light, and the sound of boys' voices.

He could not help standing a moment, and motioning Julius close to his heels, listening.

"It's broken worse than ever now," said Freddy. "It's no use trying to mend it."

"Jeff could have done it. I say, Freddy, whatever did father mean?"

"I don't know. All I know is I'll never forget dear old Jeff; shall you?"

"Rather not. I'm going to pray for him once a day, Freddy."

"All serene—so shall I."

Jeffreys stole one hurried glance through the cracked timbers, and then walked away quickly and with a heart brim full.

Whenever in after days his soul needed music, he had only to call up the voices of those two little fellows in the shed as he last heard them. Little heeded they what came of their childish words. Little heeded they that they were helping to make a true man of the Jeff they loved, and that whatever true strength he came to possess for fighting life's battles and bearing life's burdens, he owed it beyond any one to them!

He walked on rapidly and steadily for two hours, until the last lingering glow of the summer light had faded from the sky, and the lights of York behind him were lost in the night. A field of new-mown hay provided him with the most luxurious bedroom man could desire.

The thought uppermost in his mind when he awoke next morning was young Forrester. He felt that it would be useless for him to attempt anything or hope for anything till he had ascertained whatever was to be known respecting the boy's fate. Trimble's words, which rang in his ears, had a less positive sound about them. At least he would find out for himself whether they were true or false.

Grangerham, the small country town in which he had ascertained Forrester lived, and to which he had been removed from Bolsover, was far enough away from York. Jeffreys had many a time sought it out on the map, and

speculated on how it was to be reached, should a summons arrive to call him thither. It was seventy miles away as the crow flies. Jeffreys had the way there by heart. He knew what time the trains left York, what were the junctions along the line, and how far the nearest railway station would take him to his journey's end.

Now, however, it was a question of walking, not riding. The two pounds in his pocket, all he possessed, scarcely seemed his at all as long as Mr. Frampton's school bill was unsettled. At any rate, it was too precious to squander in railway fares for a man who could walk for nothing.

It was a long, harassing journey, over moors and along stony roads. It was not till the evening of the second day that the footsore traveller read on a sign-post the welcome words, "Four miles to Grangerham." He had eaten little and rested little on the way, and during the last twelve hours a broiling sun had beaten down pitilessly upon him.

If the journey of the two last days had been exhausting, the fruitless search of the day that followed was fully as wearisome. Grangerham was a pretty big manufacturing town, and Jeffreys' heart sank within him as soon as he entered it. For who among these busy crowds would be likely to know anything of an invalid old lady and her cripple grandson ?

In vain he enquired in street after street for Mrs. Forrester's address. Some had not heard the name. Some knew a public-house kept by one Tony Forrester. Some recollected an old lady who used to keep a costermonger's stall and had a baby with fits. Others, still more tantalizing, began by knowing all about it, and ended by showing that they knew nothing. At the police-office they looked at him hard, and demanded what he wanted with anybody of the name of Forrester. At the post-office they told him curtly they could not tell him anything unless he could give the old lady's address.

At length, late in the day, he ventured to knock at the door of the clergyman of that part of the town in which the

only few residents' houses seemed to be, and to repeat his question there.

The clergyman, a hard-working man who visited a hundred families in a week, at first returned the same answer as everybody else. No, he did not know any one of that name.

"Stay," he said; "perhaps you mean old Mrs. Wilcox."

Jeffreys groaned. Everybody had been suggesting the name of some old lady to him different from the one he wanted.

"She had a nephew, I think, who was a cripple. The poor fellow had had an accident at school, so I heard. I almost think he died. I never saw him myself, but if you come with me, I'll take you to the Wesleyan minister. I think he knows Mrs. Wilcox."

Thankful for any clue, however slight, Jeffreys accompanied the good man to the Wesleyan minister.

"Mrs. Wilcox—ah, yes," said the latter, when his brother pastor had explained their errand. "She died in Torquay five months ago. She was a great sufferer."

"And her nephew?" inquired the clergyman.

"Her grandson, you mean."

Jeffreys' heart leapt. "What was his name?" he asked, excitedly.

"Forrester; a dear young fellow he was. His mother, who died out in India, was Mrs. Wilcox's only daughter. Yes, poor Gerard Forrester was brought home from school about six months ago terribly crippled by an accident. It was said one of his schoolfellows had——"

"But where is he now? tell me, for mercy's sake!" exclaimed Jeffreys.

"I cannot tell you that," replied the minister. "His grandmother was ordered to Torquay almost as soon as he arrived home. He remained here about a month in charge of his old nurse; and then——"

"He's not dead!" almost shouted Jeffreys.

"Then," continued the minister, "when the news came of his grandmother's death, they left Grangerham. From all

I can hear, Mrs. Wilcox died very poor. I believe the nurse intended to try to get him taken into a hospital somewhere; but where or how I never knew. I was away in London when they disappeared, and have never heard of them since."

"Isn't his father alive?"

"Yes. I wrote to him by Mrs. Wilcox's request. He is an officer in India in the Hussars. I have had no reply, and cannot be sure that the letter has reached him, as I see that his regiment has been dispatched to Afghanistan."

"Did you never hear from the nurse?" asked Jeffreys.

"Never."

"And was it thought Forrester would recover?"

"I believe it was thought that if he got special treatment in a hospital his life might be spared."

This then was all Jeffreys could hear. Jonah Trimble might be right after all. How he abused himself for flying from York as he had done without extracting the truth first! It was too late now. He begged to be taken to see the house where Forrester lived. It was occupied by a new tenant, and all he could do was to pace up and down in front of it, in a lonely vigil, and try to imagine the pale face which only a few months back had gazed wearily from those windows on the active life without, in which he was never more to take a share.

He had not the courage to wait that night in Grangerham, although the minister urged him and Julius, tramps as they were, to do so. He felt stifled in these narrow streets, and longed for the fresh heath, where at least he could be alone.

He accepted, however, the hospitality of his guide for half an hour in order to write a short note to Mr. Frampton. He said:—

"I have come here hoping to hear something of Forrester. But I can hear nothing more than what you told me four months ago. He has left here in charge of his old nurse, and has not been heard of since. You will wonder why I have left York. The story of what happened at Bolsover reached the ears of my employer's son. He accused me of it before

all the school, and added that he knew Forrester was dead. I could not stand it, and came away—though I feel now I was foolish not to ascertain first how he had learned what you and I have not yet been able to hear. It is too terrible to believe! and I cannot believe it till I find out for myself. Where I shall go next I do not know, and feel I do not care. My guardian has left York. I saw him two days before I came away, and he told me then he should refuse to pay my last half-term's bill, which came to £7. I enclose thirty shillings now—all I have; and you may depend on my sending the rest as soon as I can earn it; for I shall be miserable as long as I owe a farthing to Bolsover."

Having written this dismal letter, and having posted it with its enclosure, he bade farewell to Grangerham, and wandered forth with the sympathetic Julius out on to the quiet heath, and there lay down—not to sleep, but to think.

CHAPTER XI

Wildtree Towers

JEFFREYS spoke truly when he wrote to Mr. Frampton that he did not know and did not care where he was going next. When he awoke in his heathery bed next morning, he lay indolently for a whole hour for no other reason than because he did not know whether to walk north, south, east or west. He lacked the festive imagination which helps many people under similar circumstances. It did not occur to him to toss up, nor was he aware of the value of turning round three times with his eyes closed and then marching straight before him. Had he been an errant knight, of course his horse would have settled the question; but as it was, he was not a knight and had not a horse. He had a dog, though. He had found Julius in possession of the caretaker at his guardian's house, and had begged her to let him have him.

"Which way are we going, Julius?" inquired the dog's master, leaning upon his elbow, and giving no sign which the dog could possibly construe into a suggestion.

Julius was far too deep an animal not to see through an artless design like this. But for all that he undertook the task of choosing. He rose from his bed, shook himself, rubbed a few early flies off his face, and then, taking up the bundle in his teeth, with a rather contemptuous sniff, walked sedately off, in the direction of the North Pole. Jeffreys dutifully followed; and thus it was that one of the most momentous turns in his life was taken in the footsteps of a dog.

Let us leave him, reader, tramping aimlessly thus o'er moor and fell, and hill and dale, leaving behind him the smoke of the cotton country and the noisy shriek of the railway, and losing himself among the lonely valleys and towering hills of Westmoreland—let us leave him, footsore, hungry, and desponding, and refresh ourselves in some more cheery scene and amidst livelier company.

Where shall we go? for we can go anywhere. That's one of the few little privileges of the storyteller. Suppose, for instance, we take farewell of humble life altogether for a while, and invite ourselves into some grand mansion, where not by the remotest possibility could Jeffreys or Jeffreys' affairs be of the very slightest interest.

What do you say to this tempting-looking mansion, marked in the map as Wildtree Towers, standing in a park of I should not like to say how many acres, on the lower slopes of one of the grandest mountains in the Lake country?

On the beautiful summer afternoon on which we first see it, it certainly looks one of the fairest spots in creation. As we stand on the doorstep, the valley opens out before us, stretching far to the south, and revealing reaches of lake and river, broad waving meadows and clustering villages, wild crags and pine-clad fells.

We, however, do not stand on the doorstep to admire the view, or even to ask admission. We have the storyteller's latchkey and invisible cap. Let us enter. As we stand in the great square hall, hung round in baronial style with antlers, and furnished in all the luxury of modern comfort, wondering through which of the dozen doors that open out of the square it would be best worth our while to penetrate, a footman, bearing a tray with afternoon tea, flits past us. Let us follow him, for afternoon tea means that living creatures are at hand.

We find ourselves in a snug little boudoir, furnished and decorated with feminine skill and taste, and commanding through the open French windows a gorgeous view down the valley. Two ladies, one middle-aged, one young, are sitting

there as the footman enters. The elder, evidently the mistress of the mansion, is reading a newspaper; the younger is dividing her time between needlework and looking rather discontentedly out of the window.

It is quite evident the two are not mother and child. There is not the slightest trace of resemblance between the handsome aquiline face of the elder, stylishly-dressed woman, and the rounder and more sensitive face of her quietly-attired companion. Nor is there much in common between the frank eyes and mock-demure mouth of the girl, and the half-imperious, half-worried look of her senior.

"Tell Mr. Rimbolt, Walker," says the mistress, as she puts down her paper, and moves her chair up to the tea-table, "and Master Percy."

A handsome gentleman, just turning grey, with an intellectual and good-humoured face, strolls into the room in response to Walker's summons.

"I was positively nearly asleep," he says; "the library gets more than its share of the afternoon sun."

"It would be better for you, dear, if you took a drive or a walk, instead of shutting yourself up with your old books."

The gentleman laughs pleasantly, and puts some sugar in his tea.

"You are not very respectful to my old friends," said he. "You forget how long we've been parted. Where's Percy?"

"Walker has gone to tell him."

"I think he is out," said the young lady; "he told me he was going down to the river."

"I consider," said Mrs. Rimbolt rather severely, "he should tell *me* what he is going to do, not you."

"But, aunt, I didn't ask him. He volunteered it."

"Fetch your uncle's cup, Raby."

Raby's mouth puckers up into a queer little smile as she obeys.

Walker appears in a minute to confirm the report of Master Percy's absence. "He's been gone this three hours, mem."

"Let some one go for him at once, Walker."

"I get so terrified when he goes off like this," says the mother; "there's no knowing what may happen, and he is so careless."

"He has a safe neck," replies the father; "he always does turn up. But if you are so fidgety, why don't you send Raby to look after him?"

"If any one went with him, it would need to be some one who, instead of encouraging him in his odd ways, would keep him in hand, and see he did not come to any harm."

"Oh," says Raby, laughing, "he wouldn't take me with him if I paid him a hundred pounds. He says girls don't know anything about science and inventions."

"He is probably right," observes Mrs. Rimbolt severely.

"Certainly, as regards the science *he* practises," says her husband. "What was it he had in hand last week? Some invention for making people invisible by painting them with invisible paint? Ha! ha! He invited me to let him try it on me."

"He *did* try it on me," chimes in Raby.

"It is nothing to laugh about," says the mother; "it is much better for him to be of an inquiring turn of mind than—idle," adds she, looking significantly at her niece's empty hand.

"It strikes me it is we who are of an inquiring turn of mind just now," said the father. "I fancy he'll turn up. He generally does. Meanwhile, I will go and finish my writing." And he politely retires.

"Raby, my dear," says Mrs. Rimbolt—Raby always knows what is coming when a sentence begins thus—"Raby, my dear, it does not sound nice to hear you making fun of your cousin. Percy is very good to you——"

"Oh yes!" interrupts Raby, almost enthusiastically.

"Which makes it all the less nice on your part to make a laughing-stock of him in the presence of his own father. It may seem unlikely that people should be rendered invisible——"

Mrs. Rimbolt stops, conscious she is about to talk nonsense, and Raby gallantly covers her retreat.

"I'm sure I wish I knew half what he does about all sorts of things."

"I wish so too," replies the aunt, severely and ungratefully.

Several hours pass, and still Master Percy does not put in an appearance. As Mrs. Rimbolt's uneasiness increases, half a dozen servants are sent out in various directions to seek the prodigal. It is an almost daily ceremony, and the huntsmen set about their task as a matter of course. No one can recollect an occasion on which Master Percy has ever come home at the right time without being looked for. If the appointed hour is four, every one feels well treated if his honour turns up at five. Nor, with the exception of his mother, and now and then Raby, does any one dream of becoming agitated for three or four hours later.

When therefere, just as the family is sitting down to dinner at half-past six, Walker enters radiant to announce that Master Percy has come in, no one thinks any more about his prolonged absence, and one or two of the servants outside say to one another that the young master must be hungry to come home at this virtuous hour.

This surmise is probably correct, for Percy presents himself in a decidedly dishevelled condition, his flannel costume being liberally bespattered with mud, and his hair very much in need of a brush and comb.

You cannot help liking the boy despite the odd, self-willed solemnity of his face. He is between fourteen and fifteen apparently, squarely built, with his mother's aquiline features and his father's strong forehead. The year he has spent at Rugby has redeemed him from being a lout, but it is uncertain whether it has done anything more. The master of his house has been heard to predict that the boy would either live to be hanged or to become a great man. Some of his less diplomatic schoolfellows had predicted both things, and when at the end of a year he refused point blank to return to school, and solemnly assured his father that if he was sent

back he should run away on the earliest opportunity, it was generally allowed that for a youth of his age he had some decided ideas of his own.

The chief fault about him, say some, is that he has too many ideas of his own, and tries to run them all together. But we are digressing, and keeping him from his dinner.

"My dear boy, where have you been?" says the mother; "we have been looking for you everywhere."

"Oh, out!" replies Percy, hastily taking stock of the bill of fare.

"Well, run and dress yourself, or dinner will be cold."

"I'm too fagged," says Percy, coolly taking a seat. "Some soup, please."

"I can't have you sit down in that state, Percy," says Mr. Rimbolt; "it is not polite to your mother and Raby."

"If the poor boy is tired," says Mrs. Rimbolt, "we must excuse him this once."

So Mr. Rimbolt, as has happened more than once before, gives in, and Percy does as he pleases.

He does full justice to his dinner, and takes no part in the conversation, which is chiefly carried on by Mr. Rimbolt, sometimes with his wife, sometimes with Raby. At length, however, the first cravings of appetite being subdued, he shows a readiness to put in his oar.

"How goes the invisible paint, Percy?" asks his father, with a twinkle in his eye.

"Used up," replies the boy solemnly. "I'm sure it would answer. I painted Hodge with it, and could scarcely see him at all from a distance."

"I believe you paint yourself," says Raby, laughing, "and that's why the men can't find you."

Percy is pleased at this, and takes it as a recognition of his genius. He has great faith in his own discovery, and it is everything to him to find some one else believing in it too.

"If you like to come to the river to-morrow, I'll show you something," says he condescendingly. "It licks the paint into fits!"

"Raby will be busy in the village to-morrow," says her aunt. "What is it you are doing at the river?"

"Oh, ah!" solemnly responds the son, whose year at a public school has not taught him the art of speaking respectfully to his parents; "wouldn't you like to know?"

"I wish you'd play somewhere else, dear. It makes me so uneasy when you are down by the river."

"Play!" says Percy rather scornfully; "I don't play there—I work!"

"I fear you are neglecting one sort of work for another, my boy," says Mr. Rimbolt; "we never got through Virgil yet, you know—at least, you didn't. I've been through three books since you deserted our readings."

"Oh, Virgil's jolly enough," replied the boy; "I'm going to finish it as soon as my experiments are over."

"What experiments?"

"Oh, it's a dodge to—I'll show it you as soon as it's finished. It's nearly done now, and it will be a tremendous tip."

This is all that can be extracted from the youthful man of science—at least, by the elders. To Raby, when the family retires to the drawing-room, the boy is more confidential, and she once more captivates him by entering heart and soul into his project and entreating to be made a party in the experiments.

"I'll see," says he; "but mind you don't go chattering!"

Mr. Rimbolt gravitates as usual to his library, and here it is that half an hour later his son presents himself, still in his working garb.

"Father," says the hopeful, "please can you give me some money?"

"Why, you have had ten shillings a week since you came home!"

"Aren't you a millionaire, father?"

"Some people say so."

"Doesn't that mean you've got a million pounds?"

"That's what 'millionaire' means."

"Ten shillings a week is only twenty-six pounds a year.'

"Quite right, and few boys get such good pocket money."

"When I come into the property I shall allow *my* son more than that," says Percy gravely.

"Not if you love him as much as I love my son," says Mr. Rimbolt, with a pleasant smile.

"Good night, father."

"Good night! Why, it's only half-past seven."

"I know. I'm going to get up early; I've got a lot of work to do. Besides, I'm miserable."

"Why?"

"Because I can't get any money."

"Why not earn some? I want some one to catalogue my books for me. What do you say to doing it? I shall pay half a crown a shelf."

Percy hesitates a bit, and looks at the bookcases, and makes a mental calculation.

"That will be about twelve pounds, won't it? Have you got a book to write the names on?"

"What! Are you going to begin now?"

"Yes."

And Percy sits up till eleven o'clock, and succeeds in that time in cataloguing after a fashion, and not badly for a first attempt, two of the smallest shelves in the library, for which he receives then and there five shillings, much to his own comfort and to his father's amusement.

Mrs. Rimbolt comes into the library just as the business is concluded.

"Why, Percy, not in bed—and so tired too!"

"Oh, I've been doing some work for father," says the boy, chinking the two half-crowns in his pocket.

"But your father, I'm sure, would not wish you to injure your health."

"Certainly not. Percy was hard up, and has just been earning five shillings."

"What do you mean—earning five shillings?"

"Yes—father's been tipping me for cataloguing his

books. Jolly hard work, but he pays on the nail, don't you, father ?"

"My dear boy," said the mother, as she and her son walks across the hall, "why did you not tell me you wanted money ? You know I do not grudge it. I don't like you to stay up so late to earn it, when you ought to be resting."

"Well, I wouldn't mind another five shillings, mother."

The mother gives him a half-sovereign and kisses him.

Percy, as he walks up the stairs, ruminating on his good luck, feels considerably more self-respect when he looks at the two half-crowns than when looking at the half-sovereign.

At the top of the stairs he shouts down to Walker :—

"I say, wake me at six, will you ? and leave my waterproof and top-boots on the hall table ; and, I say, tell Mason to cut me a dozen strong ash sticks about a yard long ; and, I say, leave a hammer and some tacks on the hall table too ; and tell Appleby to go by the early coach to Overstone and get me a pound of cork, and some whalebone, and some tar. Here's five shillings to pay for them. Don't forget. Tell him to leave them at the lodge before twelve, and I'll fetch them. Oh, and tell Raby if she wants to see what I was telling her about, she had better hang about the lodge till I come. I'm sure to be there somewhere between twelve and four."

With which the young lord of creation retires to his cubicle, leaving Walker scratching his head, and regarding the five shillings in his hand in anything but a joyful mood.

"He ought to be put on the treadmill a week or two ; that's what would do him good," observed the sage retainer to himself ; "one thing at a time, and plenty of it. A dozen ash sticks before six o'clock in the morning ! What does he want with ash sticks ? Now his schoolmaster, if he'd got one, would find them particular handy."

With which little joke Walker goes off to agitate Appleby and Mason with the news of their early morning duties, and to put the servants' hall in a flutter by announcing for the fiftieth time that summer that either he or the young master

would have to leave Wildtree Towers, because, positively—well, they would understand—a man's respect for himself demanded that he should draw the line somewhere, and that was just what Master Percy would not allow him to do.

We have changed the scene once already in this chapter. Just before we finish let us change it once more, and leaving beautiful Wildtree and its happy family, let us fly to a sorry, tumbledown, desolate shed five miles away, on the hill-side. It may have once belonged to a farm, or served as a shelter for sheep on the mountain-slopes. But it now scarcely possesses a roof, and no sign of a habitation is anywhere visible.

The night has come on rainy and dark, and a weary tramp with his dog has been thankful to crawl into its poor shelter and rest his limbs. The wind has risen and howls dismally round the shed, breaking every now and then through the loose planks, and stirring up the straw which carpets the place. But the traveller is too weary to heed it or the rain which intrudes along with it, and crouching with his dog in the darkest corner, curls himself up in true tramp fashion, and settles down to sleep.

He has lain there two hours or more, and the mountain storm begins to abate. The dog has been uneasy for some time, and now in the midst of a peal of thunder awakens his master with a gruff yap. The sleeper sits up in an instant. It is not the thunder that has disturbed the dog, nor is it thunder that the tramp now listens to close at hand. It is the sound of voices, either inside the shed or just outside it.

Not a strange thing, perhaps, in a storm like this, for two wayfarers like himself to seek shelter—and yet the tramp seems startled by the sound, and signals to the dog to lie down and hold his peace.

"Will it do?" says one voice; and the tramp perceives that the speakers are standing outside the shed under the shelter of the projecting eaves.

"No. No good. Too well looked after, and the people about the wrong sort."

"There's a pile of swag there—heaps."

"Know that. Better wait till the family are away."

"There's a child, isn't there?"

"A boy—fourteen—only child."

"Might work it that way; eh? Get a trifle for him eh?"

"A thousand, and no questions asked. It's settled."

"It is! Why didn't you say so? How are you going to do it?"

"Never you mind. Corporal and I have worked it out. It will be done to-night. Moon's down at ten. You be here at midnight, and have your hay-cart handy. Corporal and I will bring him here. We know where to find him in daylight, and can keep him quiet in the woods till dark."

"What then? Who's to keep him?"

"Wait till you've got him."

"Are you sure they'll go a thousand for him?"

"Probably two. Sheer off now, and don't forget, twelve o'clock."

The footsteps move away through the wet heather, and the tramp, waiting motionless till the last sound has faded away, draws a long breath and curls himself back into his roost.

But not to sleep—to meditate a campaign.

"Julius," says he to the dog, who appears to be fully alive to the brewing storm, "you and I will have to stop this business. There'll be three to two, unless the boy fights too. We must be here at eleven, and tackle one of them before the other two come. What do you say to that?"

Julius looks only sorry the business is not to begin at once.

Then the tramp and he go carefully into the plan of their little campaign, and, as soon as day dawns, go out for a walk, Julius taking care before quitting the shed to acquaint himself with the scent of the two gentlemen who had lately sheltered outside it.

The tramp spends a quiet day on the mountain, reading Homer, and admiring the view. Towards nightfall he descends

to Overstone and spends a few of his remaining pence in a frugal meal. Then, as the moon dips behind the shoulder of Wild Pike, he betakes himself, with the faithful Julius close at his heels, to the shed on the mountain-side.

CHAPTER XII

Kidnapping

PERCY RIMBOLT, despite his unusual literary labours of the past evening, rose promptly when Walker knocked at his door at six o'clock, and arrayed himself once more in his flannels.

The storm of the night, which had disturbed Jeffreys and his dog five miles away, had not spread as far as Wildtree, and the early summer sun was already hot as he sallied forth with his waterproof over one arm, and his dozen ash sticks under the other in the direction of the river. Kennedy, at the lodge, was considerably astonished to be awakened by a shower of gravel against his window, and to perceive, on looking out, the young master in full fishing order standing below.

" Kennedy, Appleby's going to leave some things here for me about twelve o'clock. Mind you're in, and wait till I come for them. And if Raby comes, tell her I'll be up about then ; tell her not to go away."

" Do you want me down at the river, sir ? " asked the old keeper.

" No, keep away ; and don't let any one else come below Rodnet Bridge." With which injunction the youthful man of science went on his way, leaving Kennedy to shake his head and wonder what little game the young master was up to now.

Percy plodded on a couple of miles down the stream, considerably beyond the park boundaries, till he reached Rodnet

Bridge, under which the mountain torrent slipped in a swift, deep stream. Just below the bridge, among the trees which crowded down to the water's edge, was a little hut, used by the Wildtree keepers for depositing their baskets and nets, but now appropriated by the young heir of Wildtree for far more important purposes.

It was here, in fact, that during the last two days he had conceived, and begun to put into practice, the never-before-heard-of invention of a machine for enabling a swimmer to swim up-stream at the rate of eight to ten miles an hour!

Percy's recent career had been made up of a large number of magnificent projects, admirable in every respect but one—they never quite came off. Just as they neared perfection they "gave out," and something new took their place. It would be treason, however, to hint that the "anti-current swimmer" was ever likely to give out. There certainly seemed no signs of it in the manner in which the inventor set about his task that morning. He had been provident enough to bring some sandwiches in his pockets (provided at the last moment by the much-enduring Walker), and on the strength of these he laboured half the morning. It would puzzle me to explain on what scientific principle the wonderful apparatus was laid down, what mixture between the wing of a bird, the tail of a fish, and the screw of a steamer it embodied. I never was good at mechanics, and certainly Percy Rimbolt's mechanics were such as it is given but to few to follow. Suffice it to say that by eleven o'clock the structure had reached a critical stage, and stood still for want of the cork which Appleby had been charged to procure.

The day was hot, and an hour at least must elapse before the messenger could return from Overstone. Percy, therefore, improved the shining hour by a bathe in the clear stream, with whose depths he was evidently familiar. He made no attempt, pending the completion of the machine, to oppose the swift current, but diving into it from the bridge, allowed himself luxuriously to be carried down into the shallows a hundred yards below, and without even the trouble of

swimming. This refreshing performance ended, he returned to the hut and dressed. He was in the act of locking the door, preparatory to his journey up to Kennedy's lodge, when a sack was suddenly thrown over his head from behind, and next moment he found himself pinned to the ground in the clutches of two men. Before he was well aware of what had happened, his feet were tied together, and his arms firmly lashed to his sides. The sack was lifted from his mouth, but not long enough to enable him to shout, for a gag was roughly forced between his teeth; and then, while one of his captors held his head, the other bandaged his eyes so completely that, had he not known it, he could not have told whether it was mid-day or midnight. Thus, in almost less time than it takes to narrate it, in broad daylight, and on the borders of his own father's estate, the unfortunate Percy was made captive, without so much as being able to give an alarm or to see the faces of his assailants.

He was deposited comfortably on the floor of his own hut, by the side, oh, cruel fate! of his own machine, and there left to work out any number of problems which might occur to him during the next six hours; while his custodians, having carefully padlocked the door, retired to a respectful distance among the trees, where they could smoke their pipes in peace, and at the same time keep an eye on the approaches to their young ward's dungeon.

It did not take Percy many minutes to convince himself that any attempt to struggle or extricate himself from his bonds would be labour thrown away. His captors were evidently well up to their business, and there was no wriggling out of their neatly-tied bonds. Nor did the onslaught which the boy made with his teeth on the gag result in anything but disaster. It loosened at least two of his teeth, and gave him during the remainder of the day considerable pain in some of the others. As to his eyes, he rubbed his forehead and the side of his head on the floor, in the hopes of shifting the bandage, but all in vain. He got it over his ears as well as his eyes for his pains, and could scarcely hear a sound.

As the afternoon went on, the sun slanted its rays cruelly through the little skylight on to the spot where he lay, and the flies, attracted by the rare chance, swarmed in under the door and through the cracks to make merry with their defenceless victim. Had the sun been seven times as hot, or the flies venomous and deadly, he would have preferred it, for it would have shortened his misery considerably. When at last the sun got across the window, and left him at peace, he was scarcely in a position to appreciate his mercies.

Not long after the distant Overstone chimes had sounded four, his heart (about the only unfettered portion of him) leapt to his mouth as he heard his name called in Raby's voice outside. Nor was his the only heart whom that cheery sound caused to palpitate. The two watchers in the wood above heard it, and prepared to decamp at a moment's notice, should the girl display any undue curiosity as to the contents of the hut.

But she did not. She was used to seeing it padlocked, and to listen in vain for an answer to her call. Percy was evidently abroad, probably waiting for her up at Kennedy's lodge. So she hurried back. As soon as she had disappeared beyond the bridge, the two men put their pipes into their pockets.

" If they've begun looking for him we'd best sheer off, Corporal."

" That's right," replied Corporal—" at once."

Whereupon they descended from their perches, and having looked carefully up and down, unlocked the dungeon door.

Their prisoner was lying so still and motionless, that for an instant they had their misgivings as to whether the gag had not been a trifle too much for his respiration. But a moment's examination satisfied them the boy was alive—much to their relief.

The sack was once more brought into requisition, and turned out to be a great deal larger than it looked, for it was found quite roomy enough to accommodate the whole of the person of Percy Rimbolt, who in this dignified retreat quitted

the scene of his labours on the back of one of his captors. The hut having been once more carefully padlocked, the party travelled at least a mile into the depths of the lonely woods, where at least there was no lack of shade and seclusion.

Percy was deposited somewhat unceremoniously on the ground, and left in the sack (with just sufficient aperture in the region of his nose to allow of respiration) for some hours more, unheeded by his custodians except when he attempted to move or roll over, on which occasions he was sharply reminded of his duty to his company by an unceremonious kick.

Some time later—it may have been an hour or two, or only five minutes—he was aware of a conversation taking place outside his sack.

" Risky," said one voice.

" More risky not to do it," said the other. " What use would he be if he was a dead 'un ? Besides, how are we to carry him all that way ? "

" All right, have it your way," said the other surlily.

Then Percy was conscious of some one uncording the mouth of the sack and uncovering his head.

" Young feller," said the gruffer of the two voices, " do you want your throat cut ? "

Percy shook his head in mild deprecation of such a desire.

" Do you want your tongue cut out ? "

Once more Percy disclaimed any consuming anxiety in that direction.

" Then you won't move a step or speak a word unless you're told. Do you mark that ? "

The boy nodded ; he did mark it.

Thereupon, much to his relief, the gag was taken from his mouth, and he felt himself hauled out of the ignominious sack.

" A drink ! " he gasped.

" There he goes ; I said he'd do it. Clap the gag on again."

Poor blindfolded Percy could only wave his head appealingly. He would sooner have his throat cut than feel that gag back

between his teeth. His captors let him off this once, and one of them untied the cords from his legs. He was too cramped to attempt to make any use of this partial liberty, even had he been so minded, and sank down, half fainting, to the ground.

"Give him a drink," said one of the voices; and in a moment or two he felt a cup of delicious water held to his parched lips, reviving him as if by magic. A few coarse pieces of bread were also thrust between his lips; these he swallowed painfully, for his jaws were stiff and aching, and his teeth had almost forgotten their cunning. However, when the meal was over he felt better, and would gladly have slept upon it for an hour or two, had he been allowed.

But this was no part of his captors' programme. They had not relaxed his bonds to indulge any such luxurious craving. Overstone Church had already sounded eleven, and they were due in an hour at the mountain shed.

"Get up and step out," said one of them, pulling the boy roughly to his feet.

"All very well," said Percy to himself, as he stumbled forward on his cramped limbs; "they'll have to give me a leg up if they want me to go the pace. Where are we going to next, I'd like to know?"

"Come, stir yourself," said the man again, accompanying his words by a rough shake.

Percy responded by toppling over on his face. He who knew the way to swim against stream ten miles an hour, was just now unable to walk half a dozen paces on solid ground.

"Best shove him in the sack again," growled the other man.

The bare mention of that sack startled poor Percy to his feet. If he *might* only have spoken he could easily have explained the trifling difficulty which prevented his "stepping out." As it was, all he could do was to struggle forward bravely for a few more paces, and then again fall. The men seemed to perceive that there was something more than mere playfulness in this twice-repeated performance, and solved

the difficulty by clutching him one under each arm, and materially assisting his progress by dragging him.

Any of Percy's acquaintances would have been greatly shocked had they been privileged to witness this triumphal midnight progress across the moors; his dragging legs feebly trying to imitate the motions of walking, but looking much more like kneeling, his head dropped forward on his chest, his shoulders elevated by the grip of his conductors under his pinioned arms, and his eyes bandaged as never a blind-man's-buff could bind them.

It was a long weary march that; but to Percy it was luxury compared with the morning among the flies on the hut floor. His conductors settled into a jog-trot, which the light weight of the boy did not much impede; and Percy, finding the motion not difficult, and on the whole soothing, dropped off into a half-doze, which greatly assisted in passing the time.

At length, however, he became aware of a halt and a hurried consultation between his captors.

"Is he there? Whistle?"

Corporal gave a low whistle, which after a second or two was answered from the hillside.

"That's all right!" said the other, in tones of relief. "See anything of the cart?"

Corporal peered round in the darkness.

"Yes—all right down there."

"Come on, then. Keep your eye on Jim, though, he's a mighty hand at going more than his share."

"Trust me," growled Corporal.

Then Percy felt himself seized again and dragged forward.

In about five minutes they halted again, and the whistle was repeated.

The answer came from close at hand this time.

"All square?" whispered Corporal.

"Yes!" replied a new indistinct voice—"come on."

"Jim's screwed again," said the other man; "I can tell it by his voice; there's no trusting him. Come on."

They had moved forward half a dozen steps more, when Corporal suddenly found his head enveloped in a sack—a counterpart of his own—while at the same moment the other man was borne to the ground with a great dog's fangs buried in his neckcloth.

"Hold him!" called Jeffreys to the dog, as he himself applied his energies to the subjugation of the struggling Corporal.

It was no easy task. But Jeffreys, lad as he was, was a young Samson, and had his man at a disadvantage. For Corporal, entangled with the sack and unprepared for the sudden onslaught, staggered back and fell; and before he could struggle to his feet Jeffreys was on him, almost throttling him. It was no time for polite fighting. If Jeffreys did not throttle his man, his man, as he perfectly well knew, would do more than throttle him. So he held on like grim death, till Corporal, half smothered by the sack and half choked by his assailant's clutch, howled for quarter.

Then for the first time Jeffreys felt decidedly perplexed. If he let Corporal go, Corporal, not being a man of honour, might turn on him and make mincemeat of him. If, on the other hand, he called the dog off the other man to hold Corporal while he bound him captive, the other man might abuse his opportunity in a like manner. The boy was evidently too exhausted to take any part in the encounter? What could he do?

After turning the matter over, he decided that Julius was the most competent individual to settle the business. The dog was having a very easy time with the abject villain over whom he was mounting guard, and could well undertake a little more than he had at present on his hands.

"Fetch him here, Julius," called Jeffreys, giving Corporal an additional grip; "come here, you fellow, along with the dog."

The fellow had nothing for it but to obey; and in a couple of minutes he was lying across the body of Corporal, while Julius stood fiercely over them both.

"Come here, boy," called Jeffreys next to Percy; "let me take off those cords." Percy groped his way to him.

"What are you going to do with me?" he gasped.

"Loose you; and if you're half a man you'll help me tie up these brutes. Come on—watch them there, Julius. Why, you're blindfolded, too, and how frightfully tight you're corded!"

"I've been like that since twelve o'clock."

A few moments sufficed to unfasten the captive's arms and clear his eyes.

"Now you," said Jeffreys, indicating the topmost of Julius's captives with his toe, "put your hands behind your back!"

The fellow obeyed hurriedly; he had had quite enough of Julius's attentions already to need more.

Jeffreys and Percy between them lashed first his wrists together, and then his elbows tightly to his sides. Then they secured his feet and knees in the same manner.

"He'll do—let him go, Julius," and prisoner No. 1 was rolled over, to make room for No. 2 to undergo a similar process of pinioning.

It was fortunate that the hay-cart below, of which and its owner Jeffreys and Julius had already taken possession at their leisure, had been liberally provided with cord, or their supply would have been inadequate to the strain put upon it.

At last, however, Corporal and his friend were as securely tied up as they themselves could have done it, and dragged into the shed. It was pitch-dark, and they neither of them at first perceived a third occupant of the tenement in the person of their fellow-conspirator, who was lying, bound like themselves, on the floor, where for an hour at least he had been enjoying the sweets of solitary meditation.

"Now, Julius," said Jeffreys, when his three guests were duly deposited, "you'll have to watch them here till I come back. Hold your tongues, all of you, or Julius will trouble you. Watch them, good dog, and stay here."

" Now," said he to the boy, when they found themselves outside, " what's your name ? "

" Percy Rimbolt."

" Where do you live ? "

" Wildtree Towers, five miles away."

" We can be there in an hour. We may as well use this cart, which was meant to drive you in another direction. Can you walk to it, or shall I carry you ? "

Percy, as one in a dream, walked the short distance leaning on his rescuer's arm. Then, deposited on the soft hay, too weary to trouble himself how he got there, or who this new guardian might be, he dropped off into an exhausted sleep, from which he was only aroused by the sound of his parents' voices as the cart pulled up at the door of Wildtree Towers.

CHAPTER XIII

Policeman Julius

WILDTREE TOWERS had been thrown into a state of unmistakable panic when, at the usual hour of retiring for the night, Percy had not put in an appearance. His absence at dinner-time agitated no one but his mother; and the search instituted at her bidding began languidly, and with the usual assurance of a speedy discovery. But as hour passed hour and no tidings came, things began to look serious, and even Walker pulled a long face.

Midnight came, and still no tidings. Appleby came up to the house for a lantern, but had nothing to report beyond the fact that the search so far had been unsuccessful. The minutes dragged on for the unhappy watchers. It was harder far for them to sit there in the hall, listening to the unsympathetic tick of the clock and starting at every sound on the gravel without, than it was for the father to tramp through the woods and trace the footsteps along the river's bank.

At last the clock struck two, and scarcely had the chimes ceased, when Walker put up his finger, and exclaimed,—

"Hist!"

A moment of terrible silence ensued. Then on their quickened hearing there came a distant rumble of wheels. Almost at the same instant footsteps came tearing up the gravel drive. It was Appleby, who rushed into the midst of the group assembled on the door-step.

"All right—he's found!" gasped the lad.

"Is he alive?" cried the mother.

"On a cart!" exclaimed the panting Appleby.

Mrs. Rimbolt gave a little shriek, and fell into her husband's arms. Raby, nerved by the very agony of the suspense, rushed out and ran down the drive to meet the cart.

"Is Percy there?" she cried.

The cart stopped abruptly, and a strange voice replied,—

"Yes—safe and well and fast asleep."

The words fell like music on the girl's ears. It was too dark to see anything but the shadowy form of the cart and of a man walking at the horse's head. She darted back to the house with the joyful news, and in another minute the cart stood at the door. Percy, who was decidedly enjoying his sleep, felt by no means as grateful as he should have been to find himself disturbed at this early hour of the night.

"All serene! all serene!" he growled, in response to his mother's caresses and Walker's effusive shaking of the hand. "I'm all right, mother; I want to go to bed."

"Get the hot bath ready," said Mrs. Rimbolt to the servants. "My poor boy!"

"I tell you I'm all serene; can't you let me go to bed?" said the half-awake Percy. "I don't want anything except sleep."

"Walker, help Master Percy up to bed; let him take our room, and light a fire in it, and put hot bottles in the bed."

Percy, thankful to get back to his slumbers at any price, allowed Walker to help him up stairs. At the door of his own room he stopped.

"That will do; you can cut, Walker."

"But you're to have the best room and a fire——"

"You be hanged!" exclaimed the boy, unceremoniously slamming the door in Walker's face, and locking himself in.

Downstairs, meanwhile, Jeffreys was being besieged with questions on all hands, which he endeavoured as best he could to answer. Mr. Rimbolt, however perceiving that very little good was to be got out of this confused cross-examination, asked him to follow him into the library, once more suggesting

to his wife and niece that they should go to bed. Jeffreys was thankful to find himself in a serene atmosphere, and despite all the agitation and excitement of the day, his heart warmed as he looked round on the bookshelves and their friendly occupants.

"Now," said Mr. Rimbolt, who had made no attempt to take part in the babel outside, "will you please tell me everything?"

Jeffreys obeyed, and told his story in a concise and intelligent manner, which convinced Mr. Rimbolt he had not only an honest man but a gentleman to deal with. The master of Wildtree was not an effusive man, and if Jeffreys had looked to be overwhelmed with grateful speeches he would have been disappointed. But he had not looked for it, and valued far more the quiet confidential manner in which Mr. Rimbolt entered into all the details of the narrative.

"Then," said the latter, when the story was ended, "as a matter of fact you have the three ruffians penned in the shed by your dog at this moment—an excellent piece of management."

He rang his bell, and Walker, who had felt quite out of it for the half-hour, appeared with great promptitude.

"Walker, are any of the men about still?"

"Appleby is holding this man's horse at the hall door, sir."

"Send Appleby here, and take the horse and cart round to the farm."

Poor Walker! This was a sad cut. The farm was half a mile away, across the park; and this order meant that for another hour at least he must be an outsider in the drama.

"Appleby," said Mr. Rimbolt, when that jaunty youth appeared, "take Benbow, and ride as quickly as you can, to the police-office at Overstone. Tell the inspector with my compliments, to meet me with three constables at Rodnet Bridge at six o'clock, that is, in three hours. Come back as quickly as you can, and have the dog-cart at the door at five."

"Now," said he to Jeffreys, when these various matters of business had been put in train, "we may as well occupy

our time by getting something to eat, supper and breakfast in one—I dare say you are hungry."

As Jeffreys had scarcely eaten anything for three days—in fact, since his visit to Grangerham—he could honestly admit being ready for a meal.

"I'm afraid we must forage for ourselves, unless some one is about," said Mr. Rimbolt, leading the way to the pantry.

It was a curious spectacle that of the millionaire and the tramp together investigating the contents of the pantry shelves and lockers, lifting up dish-covers here, and critically testing the consistency of pie-crusts there. They made a fairly good selection of the good things which came nearest to hand, and retiring with them to the adjacent kitchen, accomplished a meal more luxurious to Jeffreys' mind than any he had tasted since he left Bolsover.

This done, to his great satisfaction they adjourned once more to the library, where, while Mr. Rimbolt took a brief nap, he regaled himself with the luxury of a prowl among the bookshelves, by the light of the dawning day. So absorbed was he in this occupation that he did not hear the sound of the dog-cart at the front door, or heed Mr. Rimbolt's first summons to start.

"You're fond of books, surely," said that gentleman, as the two got up into the trap and drove off, with Appleby perched behind.

"I love them," said Jeffreys, in the same tone of sincerity which had attracted the York bookseller.

"You're a reader, then?"

"I would be if I had the chance," said Jeffreys.

"You are thinking of my library," said Mr. Rimbolt; "but it doesn't follow, you know, that having a house full of books makes a reader. A man may often get more good out of one tattered volume than out of an entire Russia-bound library."

"I can quite believe that," said Jeffreys.

"Probably you know what a favourite book is?" said Mr. Rimbolt rather curiously.

Jeffreys replied by producing his well-worn copy of Homer,

and it would be hard to say which of these two foolish persons evinced the most enthusiasm in discovering that they both alike had a friend in the old Greek bard. At any rate the discovery levelled at once the social differences which divided them; and in the discussion which ensued, I blush to say they forgot, for the time being, all about Percy, and the shed on the mountain side, and the three gentlemen there to whom the genial Julius was doing the honours.

The appearance of the inspector and three constables at Rodnet Bridge brought the two unpractical excursionists on Mount Olympus abruptly back to level ground. The business was soon explained. The police, of course, knew all about the "parties"—when do they not? They had been following them up for days, had had their suspicions of that mountain shed for weeks, and so on. They couldn't exactly say they had known all about the attempt to kidnap last night; but they knew all about it now, for Appleby had let it out, and the "active and intelligent" in consequence had nothing to learn. Half an hour brought them to the mountain side. Mr. Rimbolt and Jeffreys dismounted, leaving Appleby in charge of the trap, while they, followed in single file by the police, ascended the narrow track towards the shed. Halfway up, Jeffreys whistled; and a joyous bark from Julius assured the party that their game was safe.

"You'd better let me go first," said Jeffreys to the inspector, who showed some anxiety to be foremost in the capture, "unless you want my dog to fly at you."

The official fell back promptly, his native modesty getting the better of his zeal; and the party halted twenty yards from the shed while Jeffreys advanced to reconnoitre. He saw at a glance that things were not exactly as he had left them. Two out of the three prisoners remained securely bound, but the unlucky Corporal had slipped his feet from the cords, and paid dearly for his folly. Julius had him down on the ground, daring him to move a limb or even turn his head on pain of unheard-of laceration. The wretched fellow had cursed a thousand times his own artfulness. For three hours he had

lain thus, not daring to stir a muscle; and if ever a night's experiences are enough to turn the hair grey, Corporal should not have a single black lock left that morning.

"Come off, Julius, and let them alone," said Jeffreys.

Julius obeyed somewhat reluctantly, though the pleasant task of welcoming his master's return reconciled him somewhat to the abandonment of his sovereignty. Jeffreys beckoned to the party to advance.

"These are the three men, sir," said he to Mr. Rimbolt.

"Yes, sir, these are the parties," said the inspector (who had never set eyes on the men before), advancing towards Corporal as he slowly raised himself from the ground.

Julius, greatly to the officers' alarm, made a last attempt to assert his property in the captives, and in Corporal in particular; and in so doing came very near doing a grievous injury to the arm of the law. But Jeffreys' authoritative order to him to come in and lie down allowed the arrest to proceed without any further protest than a few discontented yaps as the cords were removed from the prisoners' legs, and they were led off by the force.

"We had better go to Overstone, too," said Mr. Rimbolt, "and see these ruffians safely quartered. The assizes are coming on in a week or two. Do you live anywhere near here?"

"No," said Jeffreys. "Julius and I are on a walking tour at present."

Mr. Rimbolt looked at his companion, and for the first time took notice of his travel-stained, shabby appearance.

"You mean," said he, guessing the truth, "you have no particular address at present?"

"Quite so," replied Jeffreys, flushing up uncomfortably.

Mr. Rimbolt said nothing more just then. They had a busy hour or two at Overstone arranging for the comfortable housing of their three prisoners, until the law should decide as to their more permanent residence. Then, having taken farewell of the police, and returning towards the dog-cart, Jeffreys stopped abruptly and said, raising his hat,—

"Good-bye, sir."

Mr. Rimbolt looked at him in surprise.

"You are not going, surely!" said he. "You must come back to the house with me."

"Thank you; Julius and I have a long journey before us, and must be starting."

"You are only on a walking tour, you know. There is a great deal to see round here. The place is worth exploring," said Mr. Rimbolt feeling almost as embarrassed as his companion.

"We shall be back here for the assizes," said Jeffreys.

"Nonsense, my friend!" said Mr. Rimbolt, taking the bull by the horns; "I insist on your coming back with me now, if it's only to ask how Percy is after his night's excitement. Besides, you have not half explored the library."

Whether it was the cordiality of this delicate invitation, or the mention of the library, or both combined, I cannot say; but Jeffreys, with some misgivings, yielded, and ascended the dog-cart.

"The ladies would never forgive me," said Mr. Rimbolt rather unwisely, "if I let you go without giving them an opportunity of thanking you for your goodness to Percy."

Jeffreys was sorry he had yielded. Had he only had Mr. Rimbolt and the cool Percy to deal with, he could have resigned himself to the ordeal. But the threat of being thanked by the ladies quite disconcerted him.

"I'm—I'm afraid I'm not very—tidy," stammered he. "I'd really rather, if you don't object, go on. Besides, Julius——"

Mr. Rimbolt laughed good-humouredly.

"Julius is not shy, and wants breakfast and a rest after his night's work, don't you, Julius?"

Julius could not deny that he was very ready for both. Jeffreys gave it up, and with much sinking of heart awaited their arrival at Wildtree Towers. To his infinite relief, the ladies were not visible. Mrs. Rimbolt, it was reported, was confined to her bed by the effects of her recent agitation, and

Miss Atherton was out. Master Percy was still fast asleep. It broke the fall considerably to find himself left still to the gentlemanly and unembarrassing attentions of his host.

Julius was led with honour to the kitchen, there to be regaled in a baronial fashion, which it was well for his morals and digestion was not a daily festival. Jeffreys, having seen him comfortably curled up on a mat, returned to the library. His host was pacing up and down the floor, evidently a little nervous, and Jeffreys instinctively felt that the ordeal was upon him. Mr. Rimbolt, however, began by a little fencing.

"I recollect taking a very pleasant tour through this district with two college friends when I was at Oxford. See, here is the map I had with me at the time, and the route marked. We were rather a rackety party, and boasted that we would go in a straight line from Ambleside to the sea, and stick at nothing. Here's the line, you see. That straight line took us over one or two places I wouldn't care to try now. But Oxford men, they said in those days, had no necks to break. Are you a University man?"

Jeffreys glanced up, half doubtful whether the question was asked in seriousness or ironically.

"No, sir, unfortunately not."

"Well," said Mr. Rimbolt, "it has its advantages and disadvantages. You would, I dare say, value it; but for the serious work of life it may sometimes be unsettling. Is it fair to ask what your profession is, Mr. Jeffreys?"

"None at all just now. I was till lately usher in a private school," replied Jeffreys, wincing.

Mr. Rimbolt observed the wince, and delicately steered away from the topic. "Ah, that must be a monotonous calling, and you, with your love of books and literary tastes, would find it specially irksome. You must forgive me if I take an interest in your affairs, Mr. Jeffreys. May I ask if you have any engagement in prospect?"

"None at all," said Jeffreys.

"My reason for asking is a selfish one, quite, and has been suggested by the interest you take in my library. I have

been inquiring for a month or two for some one who will assist me as a private librarian. The fact is, Mr. Jeffreys," continued Mr. Rimbolt, noticing the look of surprised pleasure in his listener's face, " with my time so much occupied in parliamentary and other duties, I find it quite impossible to attend to the care of my books as I should wish. I made up my mind most reluctantly some time ago that I should have to entrust the duty to some one else, for it was always my pride that I knew where every book I had was to be found. But my collection has grown beyond my control and wants a regular custodian. Look here," said he, opening a folding door at the end of the room.

Jeffreys saw another room, larger than the one he was in, lined with shelves, and crowded on the floor with heaps of books in most admired disorder.

" It was no use," said Mr. Rimbolt half pathetically. " I cherished the hope as long as I was able of reducing this chaos to order, and putting away each one of these treasures (for they are no common volumes) in a place of its own. Every day it grows worse. I've fought against it and put it off, because I could find no one who would undertake it as much for the love of the work as for the small salary to which a private librarian would be entitled. Now you see the selfish reason I have for mentioning the matter to you, Mr. Jeffreys. I offer you nothing to jump at; for it will need sheer hard work and a lot of drudgery to overtake the arrears of work, and after that I doubt if the keeping up of the library will leave you much leisure. You would incur no little responsibility either, for if I handed the care of the library to you, I should hold you responsible for every volume in it, and should expect you to know something of the inside of the books as well as the outside. You may think a salary of £100 a year hardly adequate to this amount of work and responsibility; if so I must not press you further, for that is the sum I have arranged to give, and cannot see my way to offering more. It would include residence here, and board, of course."

Jeffreys felt almost dazzled by the prospect thus

deprecatingly unfolded by Mr. Rimbolt. Had the offer been made in any less delicate way; had it savoured of charity to the outcast, or reward to the benefactor, he would have rejected it, however tempting. As it was, it seemed like the opening of one of the gates of Providence before him. The work promised was what of all others he coveted; the salary, with the casually-thrown in addition of board and lodging, seemed like affluence; his employer was a gentleman, and the opportunities of study and self-improvement were such as fall to the lot of few. Above all, in hard work among those quiet and friendly book-shelves he would find refuge from his bad name, and perhaps be able to establish for himself what he had hitherto striven for in vain—a character.

"I am most grateful, sir," said he, "if you really think I should suit you."

"I think you would," said Mr. Rimbolt, in a tone which gratified Jeffreys far more than if he had launched out into idle flattery and compliments.

And so it was settled. Jeffreys could scarcely believe what had happened to him when, half an hour later, Mr. Rimbolt being called away on business, he found himself taking a preliminary survey of his new preserves, and preparing himself seriously for his duties as private librarian at Wildtree Towers.

CHAPTER XIV

Snob and Snub

JEFFREYS was not long in finding out the best and the worst of his new lot at Wildtree Towers. To an ordinary thick-skinned fellow, with his love of books and partiality for boys, his daily life during the six months which followed his introduction under Mr. Rimbolt's roof might have seemed almost enviable. The whole of each morning was devoted to the duties of the library, which, under his conscientious management, gradually assumed the order of a model collection. A librarian is born, not made, and Jeffreys seemed unexpectedly and by accident to have dropped into the one niche in life for which he was best suited. Mr. Rimbolt was delighted to see his treasures gradually emerging from the chaos of an overcrowded lumber-room into the serene and dignified atmosphere of a library of well-arranged and well-tended volumes. He allowed his librarian *carte blanche* with regard to shelves and binding. He agreed to knock a third room into the two which already constituted the library, and to line it with bookcases. He even went the length of supporting a clever bookbinder at Overstone for several months with work on his own volumes, and, greatest sacrifice of all, forebore his craze of buying right and left for the same space of time until the arrears of work should be overtaken, and a clear idea could be formed of what he already had and what he wanted.

Jeffreys revelled in the work, and when he discovered

that he had to deal with one of the most valuable private collections in the country, his pride and sense of responsibility advanced step by step. He occupied his leisure hours in the study of bibliography; he read books on the old printers and their works; he spent hours with the bookbinder and printer at Overstone, studying the mechanism of a book; he even studied architecture, in connexion with the ventilation and lighting of libraries, and began to teach himself German, in order to be able to master the stores of book-lore buried in that rugged language.

All this, then, was congenial and delightful work. He was left his own master in it, and had the pride of seeing the work growing under his hands: and when one day Mr. Rimbolt arrived from London with a great man in the world of old books, for the express purpose of exhibiting to him his treasures, it called an honest flush to the librarian's face to hear the visitor say, "Upon my word, Rimbolt, I don't know whether to congratulate you most on your books or the way in which they are kept! Your librarian is a genius!"

If all his life could have been spent in the shelter of the library Jeffreys would have had little to complain of. But it was not, and out of it it needed no great discernment to perceive that he had anything but a friend in Mrs. Rimbolt. She was not openly hostile; it was not worth her while to wage war on a poor domestic, but she seemed for all that to resent his presence in the house, and to be possessed of a sort of nervous desire to lose no opportunity of putting him down.

After about a week, during which time Jeffreys had not apparently taken her hint as to the arranging of his person in "respectful" raiment, Walker waited upon the librarian in his chamber with a brown-paper parcel.

"My lady's compliments," said he, with a grin—he was getting to measure the newcomer by his mistress's standard—"and hopes they'll suit."

It was a left-off suit of Mr. Rimbolt's clothes, with the following polite note: "As Mr. Jeffreys does not appear

disposed to accept Mrs. Rimbolt's advice to provide himself with clothes suitable for the post he now occupies at Wildtree Towers, she must request him to accept the accompanying parcel, with the wish that she may not again have occasion to refer to so unpleasant a subject."

Jeffreys flushed scarlet as he read this elegant effusion, and, greatly to Walker's astonishment crushed the letter up into a ball and flung it out of the window.

"Take that away!" he shouted, pointing to the parcel.

"The mistress sent it for——"

"Take it away, do you hear?" shouted Jeffreys, starting up with a face so terrible that Walker turned pale, and evacuated the room with the offending parcel as quickly as possible.

Jeffreys' outburst of temper quickly evaporated, and indeed gave place to a much more prolonged fit of shame. Was this like conquering the evil in his nature, to be thus thrown off his balance by a trifle?

As it happened, he had ordered a suit of clothes in Overstone some days back, and was expecting them that very afternoon.

Mr. Rimbolt, on the day after his engagement, had as delicately as possible offered him a quarter's salary in advance, which Jeffreys, guessing the source which inspired the offer, had flatly refused. Mr. Rimbolt's gentlemanly urging, however, and the consciousness that his present clothes were disreputable, as well as another consideration, induced him to accept a month's stipend; and on the strength of this he had visited the Overstone tailor.

But before doing so he had discharged his mind of a still more important duty. The sense of the debt still due to Bolsover had hung round his neck night and day. It was not so much on Mr. Frampton's account. He came gradually to hate the thought of Bolsover, and the idea of being a defaulter to the place worried him beyond measure. It seemed like an insult to the memory of poor young Forrester to owe money to the place which had witnessed that

terrible tragedy; and the hope of washing his hands once for all of the school and its associations was the one faint gleam of comfort he had in looking back on the events of last year. It was therefore with a feeling of almost fierce relief that he procured a post-office order for the balance of his debt on the very afternoon of receiving the money, and enclosing it with merely his name added—for he wanted no receipt, and felt that even Mr. Frampton's letters would now no longer be of service to him—he posted it with his own hands, and hoped that he was done with Bolsover for ever. After that, with very different emotions, he visited the tailor.

The clothes arrived on the same afternoon which had witnessed the summary rejection of Mrs. Rimbolt's gift. That lady, from whom Walker had considered it prudent to keep back some of the particulars of his interview with the librarian, merely reporting "that Mr. Jeffreys was much obliged, but did not require the things," took to herself all the credit of his improved appearance when that evening Mr. Rimbolt brought him in from the library to have coffee in the drawing-room.

Jeffreys, aware that he was undergoing inspection, felt very shy and awkward, but could not quite do away with the improvement, or conceal that, despite his ugly face and ungainly figure there was something of the gentleman about him.

Mrs. Rimbolt by no means approved of her husband bringing his librarian into the drawing-room. She considered it a slight to herself and dangerous to Percy and Raby to have this person added to their family circle; and she most conscientiously made a point of lessening that danger on every occasion, by reminding him of his place and rendering his temporary visits to exalted latitudes as uncomfortable as possible. Mr. Rimbolt, good easy-going gentleman, shrugged his shoulders and felt powerless to interfere, and when, after a week or two, his librarian generally pleaded some pressing work as an excuse for not going in to coffee, he understood it quite well and did not urge the invitation.

Percy, however, had a very different way of comporting himself. What he liked he liked; what he did not like he most conveniently ignored. He was anything but a model son, as the reader has discovered. He loved his parents, indeed, but he sadly lacked that great ornament of youth—a dutiful spirit. He was spoiled, and got his own way in everything. He ruled Wildtree Towers, in fact. If his mother desired him to do what he did not like, he was for the time being deaf, and did not hear her. If he himself was overtaken in a fault, he changed the subject and talked cheerily about something else. If one of his great "dodges" came to a ridiculous end, he promptly screened it from observation by a new one.

From the day of the kidnapping adventure he was a sworn ally of Jeffreys. It mattered nothing to him who else snubbed the new librarian, or who else made his life uncomfortable. Percy liked him and thought much of him. He established a claim on his afternoons, in spite of Mrs. Rimbolt's protests and Mr. Rimbolt's arrangements. Even Jeffreys' refusal to quit work at his bidding counted for nothing. He represented to his mother that Jeffreys was necessary to his safety abroad, and to his father that Jeffreys would be knocked up if he did not take regular daily exercise. He skilfully hinted that Jeffreys read Aeschylus with him sometimes; and once, as a crowning argument, produced a complete "dodge," perfected and mechanically clever, "which," he asserted, "Jeff made me stick to till I'd done."

Mr. Rimbolt did not conceal the satisfaction with which he noticed the good influence on the boy of his new friend, and readily fell in with the arrangement that Jeffreys' afternoons should be placed at his own (which meant Percy's) disposal. As for Mrs. Rimbolt, she groaned to think of her boy consorting with quondam tramps, yet consoled herself with the knowledge that Percy had now some one who would look after him and keep him out of danger, even with a vulgar right arm.

Jeffreys accepted this new responsibility cheerfully, and

even eagerly. It sometimes came over him with a shock, what would these people say if they knew about young Forrester? Yet was not this care of a boy given to him now as a means, if not of winning back his good name, at least of atoning in some measure by the good he would try to do him, and the patience with which he would bear with his exacting ways for what was past? It was in that spirit he accepted the trust, and felt happy in it.

As the summer passed on, Wildtree, the moors around which were famous for their game, became full of visitors. The invasion did not disturb Jeffreys, for he felt that he would be able to retire into private life and avoid it. The company numbered a few boys of Percy's age, so that even that young gentleman would not be likely to require his services for a while. He therefore threw himself wholly into his work, and with the exception of an hour each afternoon, when he took a turn on the hillside, showed himself to no one.

On one of these occasions, as he was strolling through the park towards the moor, he encountered Miss Atherton, very much laden with a campstool, a basket, a parasol, and a waterproof. Shy as he was, Jeffreys could hardly pass her without offering to relieve her of part of her burden. "May I carry some of those things?" said he.

He had scarcely exchanged words with Raby since the day of his first arrival; and though he secretly numbered her among his friends, he had an uncomfortable suspicion that she looked down on him, and made an effort to be kind to him.

"Thanks, very much," said she, really glad to get rid of some of her burdens; "if you wouldn t mind taking the chair. But I'm afraid you are going the other way."

"No," said Jeffreys, taking the chair, "I was going nowhere in particular. May I not take the waterproof and basket too?"

"The basket is far too precious," said Raby, smiling; "it has grapes in it. But if you will take this horrid waterproof——"

"There is not much use for waterproofs this beautiful

weather," said Jeffreys, beginning to walk beside her. Then, suddenly recollecting himself, with a vision of Mrs. Rimbolt before his mind, he fell back, and said awkwardly,—

"Perhaps I had better—I must not detain you, Miss Atherton."

She saw through him at once, and laughed.

"You propose to follow me with those things as if I was an Eastern princess! Perhaps I had better carry them myself if you are afraid of me."

"I'm not afraid of you," said Jeffreys.

"But you are afraid of auntie. So am I—I hope she'll meet us. What were you saying about the weather, Mr. Jeffreys?"

Jeffreys glanced in alarm at his audacious companion. He had nothing for it after this challenge but to walk with her and brave the consequences. There was something in her half-mutinous, half-confiding manner which rather interested him, and made the risk he was now running rather exhilarating.

"Percy seems to have forsaken you," said she, after a pause, "since his friends came. I suppose he is sure to be blowing his brains out or something of the sort on the moors."

"Percy is a fine fellow, and certainly has some brains to blow," observed Jeffreys solemnly.

Raby laughed. "He's quite a reformed character since you came," said she; "I'm jealous of you!"

"Why?"

"Oh, he cuts me, now he has you! He used about once a week to offer to show me what he was doing. Now he only offers once a month, and then always thinks better of it."

"The thing is to get him to work at one thing at a time," said Jeffreys, to whom Percy was always an interesting study. "As soon as he has learned that art he will do great things."

"I think Percy would make a fine soldier," said Raby, with an enthusiasm which quite captivated her companion, "he's so brave and honest and determined. Isn't he?"

"Yes, and clever too."

"Of course; but my father always says a man needn't be clever to be a good soldier. He says the clever soldiers are the least valuable."

"Was your father a soldier?"

"Was? He is. He's in Afghanistan now."

"In the middle of all the fighting?"

"Yes," said Raby, with a shade across her bright face. "It's terrible, isn't it? I half dread every time I see a letter or a newspaper. Mr. Jeffreys!" added the girl, stopping short in her walk, "my father is the best and bravest man that ever lived."

"I know he is," said Jeffreys, beginning to wonder whether some of the father's good qualities were not hereditary.

Raby looked up curiously and then laughed.

"You judge of him by seeing how heroic I am braving my aunt's wrath! Oh dear, I do hope she meets us. It would be such a waste of courage if she doesn't."

"I have benefited by your courage," said Jeffreys, quite staggered at his own gallantry.

"I expect you're awfully dull in that old library," said the girl; "you should hear how uncle praises you behind your back! Poor auntie——"

At that moment they turned a corner of the shrubbery leading up to the house, and found themselves suddenly face to face with Mrs. Rimbolt with a gentleman and two or three of her lady guests. Jeffreys flushed up as guiltily as if he had been detected in a highway robbery, and absolutely forgot to salute. Even Raby, who was not at all sure that her aunt had not overheard their last words, was taken aback and looked confused. Mrs. Rimbolt bridled up like a cat going into action. She took in the situation at a glance, and drew her own inferences.

"Raby, my dear," said she, "come with us. Colonel Brotherton wishes to see Rodnet Force, and we are going there. Oh, Mr. Jeffreys," added she, turning frigidly upon the already laden librarian, "when you have carried Miss

Atherton's things into the house, be good enough to go to Kennedy and tell him to meet us at the Upper Fall. And you will find some letters on the hall table to be posted. By-the-way, Colonel Brotherton, if you have that telegram you want to send off, the librarian will go with it. It is a pity you should have the walk."

To these miscellaneous orders Jeffreys bowed solemnly, and did not fail to exhibit his clumsiness by dropping Raby's waterproof in a belated effort to raise his hat. Mrs. Rimbolt would hardly have been appeased had he not done so; and it was probably in a final endeavour to show him off as he departed that she added,—

"Raby, give Mr. Jeffreys that basket to take in; you cannot carry that up to the Falls."

"Oh, aunt, I've told Mr. Jeffreys I can't trust him with it. It has grapes in it. Didn't I, Mr. Jeffreys?" she said, appealing gaily to him with a smile which seemed to make a man of him once more.

"I will undertake not to eat them," said he, with a twitch of his mouth, receiving the precious basket.

After that he sacrificed even his afternoon constitutionals, and took to the life of a hermit until Wildtree Towers should be rid of its visitors. But even so he could not be quite safe. Percy occasionally hunted him out and demanded his company with himself and a few choice spirits on some harebrained expedition. Jeffreys did not object to Percy or the harebrained expedition; but the "choice spirits" sometimes discomposed him. They called him "Jeffy," and treated him like some favoured domestic animal. They recognized him as a sort of custodian of Percy, and on that account showed off before him, and demonstrated to Percy that he was no custodian of theirs. They freely discussed his ugliness and poverty within earshot. They patronized him without stint, and made a display of their own affluence in his presence. And when once or twice he put down his foot and interdicted some illegal proceeding, they blustered rudely, and advised Percy to get the cad dismissed.

It was like some of the old Bolsover days back again, only with the difference that now he steeled himself to endure all patiently for young Forrester's sake. It disappointed him to see Percy, led away by his company, sometimes lift his heel against him; yet it suited his humour to think it was only right, and a part of his penance, it should be so. Percy's revolt, to do that youth justice, was short-lived and speedily repented of. As soon as his friends were gone he returned to Jeffreys with all his old allegiance, and showed his remorse by forgetting all about his recent conduct.

Perhaps the most trying incident in all that trying time to Jeffreys was what occurred on the last day of the Brothertons' visit. The colonel and his family had been so busy seeing the natural beauties of Wildtree, that, till their visit was drawing to an end, they found they had scarcely done justice to the beautiful house itself, and what it contained. Consequently the last evening was spent in a visit *en masse* to the library where Jeffreys was duly summoned to assist Mr. Rimbolt in exhibiting the treasures it contained.

As usual when the lady of the house was of the party, the librarian went through his work awkwardly. He answered her questions in a confused manner, and contrived to knock over one or two books in his endeavour to reach down others. He was conscious that some of the company were including him among the curiosities of the place, and that Mr. Rimbolt himself was disappointed with the result of the exhibition. He struggled hard to pull himself together, and in a measure succeeded before the visit was over, thanks chiefly to Mrs. Rimbolt's temporary absence from the library. The lady returned to announce that coffee was ready in the drawing-room, and Jeffreys, with a sigh of relief, witnessed a general movement towards the door.

He was standing rather dismally near the table, counting the seconds till he should be left alone, when Mrs. Brotherton advanced to him with outstretched hand. Imagining she was about to wish him good-evening in a more friendly manner than he had expected, he advanced his own hand,

when, to his horror and dismay, he felt a half-crown dropped into it, with the half-whispered remark, "We are much obliged to you."

He was too staggered to do anything but drop his jaw and stare at the coin until the last of the party had filed from the room, not even observing the look of droll sympathy which Raby, the last to depart, darted at him.

Left to himself, one of his now rare fits of temper broke over him. He stormed out of the place and up into his room, where, after flinging the coin into the grate, he paced up and down the floor like an infuriated animal. Then by a sudden impulse he picked the coin up, and opening a tool-box which he kept in the room, he took from it a hammer and bradawl. Two or three vicious blows sufficed to make a hole in the centre of the Queen's countenance. Then with a brass-headed nail he pinned the miscreant piece of silver to the wall above the mantelpiece, and sat looking at it till the storm was over.

It was a week or two before he quite recovered from this shock and settled down again to the ordinary routine of his life at Wildtree Towers. As the afternoons became shorter, and out-of-door occupations in consequence became limited, he found Percy unexpectedly amenable to a quiet course of study, which greatly improved the tone of that versatile young gentleman's mind. Percy still resolutely set his face against a return to school, and offered no encouragement to his perplexed parents in their various schemes for the advancement of his education. Consequently they were fain to be thankful, until some light dawned on the question, that his education was not being wholly neglected, and Mr. Rimbolt in particular recognized that under Jeffreys' influence and tuition the boy was improving in more ways than one.

The autumn passed uneventfully. Mr. Rimbolt had occasion once or twice to go up to London, and on these occasions Jeffreys was reminded that he was not on a bed of roses at Wildtree. But that half-crown over the mantelpiece

helped him wonderfully. Raby continued to regard him from a distance with a friendly eye, and now and then alarmed him by challenging him to some daring act of mutiny which was sure to end in confusion, but which, for all that, always seemed to him to have some compensation in the fellow-feeling it established between the poor librarian and the dependent and kept-under niece.

News arrived now and then from India, bringing relief as to what was past, but by no means allaying anxiety as to what might be in store for the soldier there. A week before Christmas, Raby told Jeffreys, with mingled pride and trepidation, that her father had written to say he had been made major, and expected to be sent in charge of a small advance force towards Kandahar, to clear the way for a general advance. By the same post another letter came for Mrs. Rimbolt, the contents of which, as the Fates would have it, also came to Jeffreys' ears.

"My dear," said the lady, entering the library that evening, letter in hand, and addressing her husband, who was just then engaged with his librarian in inspecting some new purchases, "here is a letter from my old friend Louisa Scarfe. She proposes to come to us for Christmas, and bring with her her son, who is now at Oxford. I suppose I can write and say Yes?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Rimbolt; "I shall be delighted.'

A chill went to Jeffreys' heart as he overheard this hurried consultation. If this should be the Scarfe he knew, he was not yet rid, he felt, of Bolsover or of his bad name.

CHAPTER XV

Fallen in a Hole

MRS. SCARFE and her son arrived a day or two later at Wildtree Towers. Jeffreys, who from the recesses of a bay window was an unseen witness of the arrival, saw at a glance that his forebodings were too true. Scarfe had changed somewhat since we saw him at Bolsover fifteen months ago. He was older and better-looking and wore a trim black moustache. His dress was in the best Oxford style; and in his easy, confident carriage there remained no trace of the overgrown schoolboy. His mother, a delicate-looking widow lady, returned Mrs. Rimbolt's greeting with the eagerness of an old friend, and introduced her son with evident pride.

It was hopeless for Jeffreys to think of avoiding a recognition for long. Still, he anxiously put off the evil hour as long as possible. The first afternoon and evening this was not difficult, for the travellers had made a long journey and retired early. The following day he went through his work on tenter-hooks. Every time the library door opened he felt his heart sink within him, and every footstep he heard crossing the hall seemed to be the one he dreaded.

In the evening he attempted to escape the inevitable by taking refuge in his room after dinner. But as it happened a messenger arrived from Overstone with a parcel of books, which made it necessary for him to return to the library. And while there Mr. Rimbolt as usual came in.

As soon as the business matter had been arranged Mr. Rimbolt said, "Miss Atherton has been asking to see Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, Jeffreys; will you kindly take the book to her in the drawing-room? I have one of my tenants to see here, but I shall be in shortly."

There was no possible escape from this dilemma. With a groan he got the book down from its place and went.

Scarfe, as he entered the drawing-room, was engaged in turning over a book of prints with Raby, and did not notice him. Nor did Mrs. Rimbolt, siting on the sofa beside her friend, heed his entrance till Percy said,—

"Hullo, Jeff!"

Jeffreys became aware that the eyes of the whole party were suddenly centred on him—Mrs. Rimbolt's from under lifted eyebrows, Mrs. Scarfe's through raised eye-glasses, Raby's with a veiled welcome, Scarfe's in blank astonishment. He advanced awkwardly into the room.

"Close the door, please, Mr. Jeffreys,' said Mrs. Rimbolt, in tones which left no manner of doubt in her visitors' minds as to the status of the librarian in the house.

Jeffreys obeyed, and advanced once more towards Raby.

"Your uncle," stammered he, conscious of nothing but Scarfe's stare, "asked me to bring you this book." Then, turning with a desperate effort to his old schoolfellow, he said, "How are you, Scarfe?"

He scorned himself for the half-appealing tone in which the salutation was made. What was Scarfe to him? Nothing, save that Scarfe and he had both looked down that October afternoon on the motionless form of one small boy in the Bolsover meadow. And was that nothing?

"How do you do, Jeffreys?" said Scarfe, stiffly extending his hand, and immediately afterwards returning to his examination of the prints with Raby.

"Do you know Jeff?" asked Percy, who had witnessed the recognition.

"Yes. Jeffreys and I have met," said Scarfe, not looking up from his book.

"Who is that young man?" said Mrs. Scarfe, in an audible whisper to her hostess.

"The librarian here. Mr. Jeffreys," added Mrs. Rimbolt, as Jeffreys stood irresolute, not knowing whether to remain in the room or go, "be good enough to tell Walker he can bring the coffee, and tell Mr. Rimbolt we are expecting him."

"Mr. Rimbolt asked me to say you are not to wait coffee for him. He may be detained with a tenant in the library."

"Jeff, I say, you should have been with us this afternoon We had such larks. We got one or two pot shots, but didn't hit anything except the dog. So it's a good job we didn't borrow Julius. Kennedy says we're in for a ripping frost, so save yourself up, old man."

"Percy, you talk like a stable-boy. Do remember you are in the drawing-room; and don't detain Mr. Jeffreys from his work."

Under cover of this maternal exhortation Jeffreys withdrew.

"Rum your knowing Jeff, Scarfe!" said Percy, after he had gone; "was he at Oxford?"

"No," said Scarfe. "It was at school. Surely that must be one of Hogarth's engravings, Miss Atherton, it is exactly his style."

"It wasn't much of a school, was it?" persisted Percy. "Jeff told me he didn't care about it."

"I don't think he did," replied Scarfe with a faint smile.

"I suppose you are very fond of Oxford, are you not? said Mrs. Rimbolt; "every one who belongs to the University seems very proud of it."

This effectually turned the conversation away from Jeffreys, and the subject was not recurred to that evening, except just when Scarfe was bidding his mother good-night in her boudoir.

"I hope you won't be dull here," said she. "Miss Atherton seems a pleasant girl, but it is a pity Percy is not older and more of a companion."

"Oh, I shall enjoy myself," said Scarfe.

"You don't seem very fond of that Mr. Jeffreys."

"No, I draw the line somewhere, mother," said the son.

"What do you mean? Is there anything discreditable about him? He looks common and stupid, to be sure. Mrs. Rimbolt tells me Percy is greatly taken up with him."

"They appear to have curious ideas about the kind of companion they choose for their boy," said Scarfe. "But it's no business of ours. Good-night, mother."

And he went, leaving Mrs. Scarfe decidedly mystified.

Jeffreys and Scarfe occasionally met during the next few days. Jeffreys was rather relieved to find that his late schoolfellow seemed by no means anxious to recall an old acquaintance or to refer to Bolsover. He could even forgive him for falling into the usual mode of treating the librarian as an inferior. It mattered little enough to him, seeing what Scarfe already knew about him, what he thought of him at Wildtree. On the whole, the less they met and the less they talked together, the less chance was there of rousing bitter memories. The Scarfes would hardly remain more than a month. If for that time he could efface himself, the danger might blow over, and he might be left at the end of the time with the secret of his bad name still safe at Wildtree Towers.

Kennedy's prophecy of a hard frost turned out to have been a knowing one. All through Christmas week it continued with a severity rare even in that mountainous region; and when on New Year's Day the report reached Wildtree that a man had skated across the upper end of Wellmere it was admitted to be a frost which, to the younger generation of the place at least, "beat record."

Percy was particularly enthusiastic, and terrified his mother by announcing that he meant to skate across Wellmere, too. Raby, though less ambitious, was equally keen for the ice; and Scarfe, indolently inclined as he was, was constrained to declare himself also anxious to put on his skates.

A day was lost owing to the fact that Percy's skates, which had lain idle for two years, were now too small for him and useless.

Mrs. Rimbolt devoutly hoped the ironmonger in Overstone would have none to fit him, and used the interval in intriguing right and left to stop the projected expedition.

She represented to her husband that the head gardener was of opinion that the frost had reached its height two days ago. She discovered that Scarfe had a cold, to which exposure might be disastrous. Raby she peremptorily forbade to dream of the ice; and as for Percy, she conjured him by the love he bore her to skate on nothing deeper than the Rodnet Marsh, whereat that young gentleman gibed. The Overstone ironmonger had skates which fitted the boy to a nicety, and by way of business sent up "on inspection" a pair which Mr. Rimbolt might find useful for himself.

"You surely will not allow Percy to go?" said the lady to her husband, on the morning after the arrival of the skates.

"Why not? He's a good skater, and we don't often have a frost."

"But on Wellmere! Think of the danger!"

"I often skated across Wellmere when I was a boy. I would not object to do it again if I had the time to spare. I declare the sight of the skates tempted me."

"I don't believe Mr. Scarfe can swim. What would happen if there were an accident?"

"I think you overrate the danger," said her husband; "however, if it pleases you, I will get Jeffreys to go with them. He can swim, and I dare say he can skate, too."

Mrs. Rimbolt shied a little at the suggestion, but yielded to it as a compromise, being better than nothing.

Jeffreys would fain have evaded this unexpected service.

"I have no skates," he said, when Mr. Rimbolt proposed it.

"Yes; the ironmonger sent up a pair for me, and as I can't use them you are welcome to them."

"Did you not want the books from Sotheby's collated before to-morrow?"

"No, Saturday will do. Honestly, Jeffreys, I would be more comfortable, so would Mrs. Rimbolt, if you went.

We have experience of the care you take of Percy. So, you see, I ask a favour."

It was useless to hold out.

"I will go," said he; and it was settled.

An hour later Scarfe, Percy, Jeffreys, and Julius stood at the hall door ready to start.

"Where's Raby, I say?" cried Percy; "she said she'd come."

"I do not wish Raby to go."

"Oh, look here, mother, as if we couldn't look after her; eh, Scarfe?"

"It will be no pleasure without Miss Atherton," said Scarfe.

"Can't she come, father?" said Percy, adroitly appealing to Cæsar.

"I really think it would be a pity she should miss the fun."

"Huzzah! Raby, where are you? Look sharp! father says you can come, and we're waiting!" cried Percy.

Raby, who had been watching the party rather wistfully, did not keep them long waiting.

Wellmere was a large lake some five miles long and a mile across. In times of frost it not unfrequently became partially frozen, but owing to the current of the river which passed through it, it seldom froze so completely as to allow of being traversed on skates. This, however, was an extraordinary frost, and the feat of the adventurer on New Year's Day had been several times repeated already.

The Wildtree party found the ice in excellent order, and the exhilarating sensation of skimming over the glassy surface banished for the time all the unpleasant impressions of the walk. It was several years since Jeffreys had worn skates, but he found that five minutes was sufficient to render him at home on the ice. He eschewed figures, and devoted himself entirely to straightforward skating, which, as it happened, was all that Percy could accomplish—all, indeed, that he aspired too.

It therefore happened naturally that Scarfe and Raby, who cultivated the eccentricities of skating, were left to their own devices, while Jeffreys, accompanied of course by Julius, kept pace with his young hero for the distant shore. It was a magnificent stretch. The wind was dead, the ice was perfect, and their skates were true and sharp.

"Isn't this grand?" cried Percy, all aglow, as they scudded along, far outstripping the perplexed Julius. "Better than smoking cigarettes, eh, old Jeff?"

Jeffreys accepted this characteristic tender of reconciliation with a thankful smile.

"I was never on such ice!" said he.

"Looks as if it couldn't thaw, doesn't it?" said Percy. "It's better here in the middle than nearer the shore. I hope those two won't get too near the river, it looks more shaky there."

"Trust Scarfe! He knows what's what! I say, aren't he and Raby spoons?"

"Mind that log of wood. It must be pretty shallow here," said Jeffreys, his face glowing with something more than the exercise.

They made a most successful crossing. Returning, a slight breeze behind them favoured their progress, and poor Julius had a sterner chase than ever.

As they neared their starting-point Jeffreys looked about rather anxiously for Scarfe and Raby, who, tiring of their fancy skating, had started on a little excursion of their own out into the lake.

"I wish they wouldn't go that way," said he, as he watched them skimming along hand-in-hand; "it may be all right, but the current is sure to make the ice weaker than out here."

"Oh, they're all serene," said Percy. "I'll yell to them when we get near enough."

Presently, as they themselves neared the shore, they noticed Scarfe turn and make for the land, evidently for something that had been forgotten, or else to make good some defect in his skates. Raby, while waiting, amused herself with cutting

some graceful figures and curveting to and fro, but always, as Jeffreys noted with concern, edging nearer to the river.

Percy shouted and waved to her to come the other way. She answered the call gaily and started towards them. Almost as she started there was a crack, like the report of a gun, followed by a cry from the girl.

Jeffreys, with an exclamation of horror and a call to Julius, dashed in an instant towards her. The light girlish figure, however, glided safely over the place of danger. Jeffreys had just time to swerve and let her pass, and next moment he was struggling heavily twenty yards beyond in ten feet of icy water.

It all happened in a moment. Percy's shout, the crack, the girl's cry, and Julius's wild howl, all seemed part of the same noise.

Percy, the first of the spectators to recover his selfpossession, shouted to Scarfe, and started for the whole.

"I'm all right, don't come nearer," called Jeffreys, as he approached; "there's a ladder there, where Scarfe is. Bring it."

Percy darted off at a tangent, leaving Jeffreys, cool in body and mind, to await his return. To an ordinarily excitable person, the position was a critical one. The water was numbing; the ice at the edge of the hole was rotten, and broke away with every effort he made to climb on to it; even Julius, floundering beside him, bewildered, and at times a dead weight on his arms and neck, was embarrassing. Jeffreys, however, did not exhaust himself by wild struggles. He laid his stick across the corner of the hole where the ice seemed firmest, and with his arms upon it propped himself with tolerable security. He ordered the dog out of the water and made him lie still at a little distance on the ice. He even contrived to kick off one boot, skate and all, into the water, but was too numbed to rid himself of the other.

It seemed an eternity while Scarfe and Percy approached with the ladder, with Raby, terrified and pale, hovering behind.

"*Don't come nearer*," he shouted, when at last they got within reach. "Slide it along."

They pushed it, and it slipped to within a yard of him. Julius, who appeared to have mastered the situation, jumped forward, and fixing his teeth in the top rung, dragged it the remaining distance.

The remainder was easy. Scarfe crawled along the ladder cautiously till within reach of the almost exhausted Jeffreys, and caught him under the shoulder, dragging him partially up.

"I can hold now," said Jeffreys, "if you and Percy will drag the ladder. Julius, hold me, and drag too."

This combined effort succeeded. A minute later, Jeffreys, numbed with cold but otherwise unhurt, was being escorted on his one skate between Percy and Scarfe for the shore, where Raby awaited him with a look that revived him as nothing else could.

CHAPTER XVI

A Brush near Kandahar

WHILE Raby that night dreamed troublously of the events of the day, a soldier was sitting in his tent near Kandahar, some four thousand or more miles away, reading a letter. He was an officer; his sword lay beside him on the table, his boots were off, and a flannel coat took the place of the regimental jacket which lay beside his saddle on the floor. If these signs were not sufficient to prove that for the time being he was off duty, his attitude as he lolled back in his camp-chair, with his feet on the table considerably above the level of his chin, reading his letter by the uncertain light of a lamp, would have left little doubt on the subject. So engrossed indeed was he that he was unaware of the presence of his native servant in the tent preparing supper, and read aloud to himself. The envelope of the letter, which lay on the table, was a foreign one with an English stamp, and addressed in a feminine hand.

The soldier, having completed his first perusal, turned back to the beginning, reading partly to himself, partly aloud.

"'October 4'—three months ago or more!—before she heard of this business. 'You poor dull darling'—nice names to call one's father! true enough, though, at the time, it was brutally dull at Simla—'I can fancy how you hate loafing about all day with nothing to do but try and keep cool and find a place to sleep in where the flies can't worry you.' Hum!

Picture of a soldier's life! A little different from the usual impression, but not very wide of the mark after all."

Then he read to himself for a bit something which made his weather-beaten face soften, and brought a sparkle to his eyes.

"Bless the child!" he murmured; "she doesn't forget her old father! 'How glad I shall be if you get sent to the front, for I know how you hate doing nothing. If you are, I shall be foolish, of course, and imagine all sorts of horrors whenever I see a letter.' That's the way girls back their fathers up! 'Oh, why couldn't I be a soldier too, and ride behind you into action, instead of dawdling here doing no good to anybody, and living like a fine young lady instead of a simple soldier's daughter?' Whew! what a fine little colour-sergeant she'd make! Wouldn't Mrs. Grundy sit up if she read that?

"Hum!" he went on, after reading a little further. "'I oughtn't to grumble. Uncle Rimbolt is the kindest of protectors, and lets me have far too many nice things. Aunt has a far better idea of what a captain's daughter should be. She doesn't spoil me. She's like a sort of animated extinguisher, and whenever I flicker up a bit she's down on me. I enjoy it, and I think she is far better pleased that I give her something to do than if I was awfully meek. It all helps to pass the time till my dear old captain comes home.' Heigho! that means she's miserable, and I'm not to guess it! I had my doubts of Charlotte Rimbolt when I let her go to Wildtree. Poor little Raby! she's no match for an animated extinguisher!

"'Percy,' continued the letter, 'is as lively and full of "dodges" as ever. He soon got over his kidnapping adventure. Indeed, the only difference it has made is that we have now one, or rather two, new inmates at Wildtree, for Uncle Rimbolt has employed Percy's rescuer as his librarian, and the dog has, of course, taken up his abode here too. He is a perfect darling! so handsome and clever! He took to me the first moment I saw him, and he would do anything for me.'

Really!" said the father; "that's coming it rather strong, isn't it, with the new librar—Oh, perhaps she means the dog! Ha, ha! 'Aunt Rimbolt gets some fine extinguisher practice with this new-comer, against whom she has a most unaccountable prejudice. He is very shy and gentlemanly, but I am sure Percy never had a better friend. He has become ever so much steadier.' Did you ever know such letter-writers as these girls are? Which new-comer does she mean, the fellow who's a perfect darling, or the fellow who's shy and gentlemanly? and which, in the name of wonder, is the man and which the dog? Upon my word, something awful might be going on, and I should be none the wiser! 'Julius nearly always escorts me in my walks. He is *such* a dear friendly fellow, and always carries my bag or parasol. Aunt, of course, doesn't approve of our being so devoted to one another, for she looks upon Julius as an interloper; but it doesn't matter much to us. Percy often comes with us, but Julius rather resents a third person. He thinks—so do I, much as I like Percy—that two are company and three are none.'"

Major Atherton—for the soldier was no other—leaned back in his chair, and fanned himself with the letter.

"How *on earth* am I to know who or what she is talking about? If it's not the dog, upon my honour, Aunt Rimbolt ——It can't be the dog, though. She calls him Julius; and why should she take the boy along with them if it wasn't the librarian puppy she walked with? Rimbolt ought to look after things better than that!

"'Uncle Rimbolt thinks very highly of his new *protégé*. He is so quiet; it is quite painful sometimes talking to him. I'm sure he has had a lot of trouble; he has a sort of hunted look sometimes which is quite pathetic. Aunt hardly ever lets him come into the drawing-room, and when she does it is generally in order to snub him. I fancy he feels his anomalous position in this house very much.'

"My patience! That's a mild way of putting it!" exclaimed the major; "the anomalous position of this hunted-

looking, shy librarian who carries her parasol and escorts her about, and suggests to Percy that two are company and three are none! All I can say is the sooner we get into Kandahar and are paid off home the better!"

"What's that you're saying about Kandahar, old man?" said a voice at the door of the tent, and there entered a handsome jaunty-looking officer of about Atherton's age.

"That you, Forrester? Come in. I've just had a letter from my little girl."

A shade crossed Captain Forrester's cheery face.

"Your luck, my dear boy. I haven't had a line."

"Perhaps there's a letter for you at head-quarters."

"I doubt it. But don't talk about it. How's your girl flourishing?"

"Upon my honour, she seems to be a little too flourishing," said the major, taking up his letter with a look of puzzled concern. "You may be a better English scholar than I am, Forrester, and be able to make head or tail of this. As far as I can make it out, Raby is flourishing very decidedly. Here, read this second sheet."

Captain Forrester took the letter, and read the part indicated carefully.

The major watched him anxiously till he had done.

"Well?" he asked, as his comrade handed it back.

"It seems to be a case," said the latter.

"That's what I thought. I don't like that carrying her parasol, and telling the boy that two are company——"

Captain Forrester burst into a loud laugh.

"Why, you glorious old donkey, that's the dog!"

"Nonsense; she'd never say a dog was shy and gentlemanly, and looked as if he'd had a lot of trouble."

"No," said the captain holding his sides, "that's the librarian."

"Who—the fellow Julius she talks about?" asked the major, beginning to feel very warm.

"The fellow Julius! Why, Julius is the dog!"

The major rose from his seat in agitation, and stood before his friend.

"Forrester," said he solemnly, "as soon as I see the joke I'll laugh. Meanwhile tell me this. Who in the name of mystery is it who feels his anomalous position at Wildtree, the man or the dog?"

Captain Forrester held gallantly on to his chair to prevent falling off; and the native without, hearing his shouts, looked in at the door to see what the sahib wanted.

"My dear fellow," said he at last, "I begin to think I know more than you. Can't you see this daughter of yours is decidedly interested in this young *protégé* of her uncle?"

"Most decidedly I see that."

"And that in order to throw dust in your fatherly old eyes, she makes a great gush about the dog Julius, and says hardly a word about the master, whose name does not appear."

Major Atherton took up the letter again and glanced through it, and a light began to break on his puzzled countenance.

"Then," said he, "the fellow who's handsome and clever and a perfect darling is——"

"Is the bow-wow. And the fellow who's hunted-looking and not allowed in the drawing-room is his master."

Major Atherton resumed his chair, and once more planted his feet on the table.

"That is a way of putting it, certainly. If so, it's a relief."

"My dear boy, keep your eye on that librarian, or he may change places with his dog in double-quick time."

The major laughed, and a pause ensued. Then Forrester said—

"Two or three days more, and we ought to be in Kandahar."

"We are to have a stiff brush or two before we get there," said the major; "any hour now may bring us to close quarters."

There was another pause. Captain Forrester fidgeted about uneasily, and presently said—

"It's possible, old man, only one of us may get through. If I am the one who is left behind, will you promise me something?"

"You know I will."

"That boy of mine, Atherton, is somewhere, I'm as sure of it as that I'm sitting here. He's vanished. My letters to Grangerham cannot all have miscarried, and they certainly have none of them been answered. My mother-in-law, as I told you, died in the south of England. The boy may have been with her, or left behind in Grangerham, or he may be anywhere. I told you of the letter I had from the school?"

"Yes; he had had an accident and gone home damaged—crippled, in fact."

"Yes," said Captain Forrester, with a groan, "crippled—and perhaps left without a friend."

"You want me to promise to find him if you are not there to do it, and be a father to him. You needn't ask it, old man, for I promise."

"I've nothing to leave him," said Captain Forrester, "except my sword and this watch——"

"And the good name of a gallant soldier. I will, if it is left to me to do it, take the boy all three."

"Thanks, Atherton. You know that I would do the same by you, old fellow."

"You may have the chance. That girl of mine, you know," added the major, with a tremble in his voice, "would have what little I have saved, which is not much. She's a good girl, but she would need a protector if I was not there."

"She shall have it," said his friend.

"I'm not sure that she's happy at Wildtree," continued the father, with a smile, "despite the dog and his master. Rimbolt's a bookworm, and doesn't see what goes on under his nose, and her aunt, as she says, is an animated extinguisher. It always puzzled me how Rimbolt came to marry Charlotte Halgrove."

"Halgrove? Was she the sister of your old college friend?"

"Yes. Rimbolt, Halgrove, and I were inseparable when we were at Oxford. Did I ever tell you of our walking tour in the Lakes? We ruled a bee-line across the map with a ruler and walked along it, neck or nothing. Of course you know about it. We've sobered down since then. Rimbolt married Halgrove's sister, and I married Rimbolt's. I had no sister, so Halgrove remained a bachelor."

"What became of him?"

"I fancy he made a mess of it, poor fellow. He went in for finance, and it was too much for him. Not that he lost his money; but he became a little too smart. He dropped a hundred or two of mine, and a good deal more of Rimbolt's—but he could spare it. The last I heard of him was about twelve years ago. He had a partner called Jeffreys; a stupid honest sort of fellow who believed in him. I had a newspaper sent me with an account of an inquest on poor Jeffreys, who had gone out of his mind after some heavy losses. There was no special reason to connect Halgrove with the losses, except that Jeffreys would never have dreamed of speculating if he hadn't been led on. And it's only fair to Halgrove to say that after the event he offered to take charge of Jeffreys' boy, at that time eight years old. That shows there was some good in him."

"Unless," suggested Captain Forrester, "there was some money along with the boy."

"Well, I dare say if he's alive still, Rimbolt will know something of him; so I may come across him yet," said the major; and there the conversation ended.

Major Atherton's prophecy of a brush with the enemy was not long in being fulfilled.

Early next day the expeditionary force was ordered forward, the cavalry regiment in which the two friends were officers being sent ahead to reconnoitre and clear the passes.

The march lay for some distance along a rocky valley, almost desolate of habitations, and at parts so cumbered

with rocks and stones as to be scarcely passable by the horses, still less by the artillery, which struggled forward in front of the main body. The rocks on the right bank towered to a vast height, breaking here and there into a gorge which admitted some mountain stream down into the river below, and less frequently falling back to make way for a wild saddleback pass into the plains above.

Along such a course every step was perilous, for the enemy had already been reported as hovering at the back of these ugly rocks, and might show their teeth at any moment.

For an hour or two, however, the march continued uninterrupted. The few scattered Afghans who had appeared for a moment on the heights above had fallen back after exchanging shots, with no attempt at serious resistance. The main body had been halted in the valley, awaiting the return of the scouts. The horses had been unharnessed from the guns, and the officers were snatching a hurried meal, when Captain Forrester at the head of a few troopers scampered into the lines. The news instantly spread that the enemy had been seen ahead, and was even then being chased by the cavalry up one of the defiles to the right.

Instantly, and without even waiting for the word of command, every man was in his place ready to go on. The guns, with Captain Forrester's troop as escort, dashed forward to hold the defile; while the main body, divided into two divisions—one to follow the guns, the other to reach the plain above by a nearer pass—started forward into action.

The cavalry, meanwhile, with Major Atherton at their head, were already engaged in a hot scrimmage.

Following their usual tactics, the Afghans, after exchanging shots at the entrance of the pass, had turned tail and dashed through the defile, with the English at their heels. Then, suddenly turning as they reached the plain beyond, they faced round on their pursuers, not yet clear of the rocky gorge. In the present instance, however, when within about a hundred yards of the head of the column, they wheeled round again, and once more bolted into the open.

A stern chase ensued over the rough broken ground, the enemy now and then making a show of halting, but as often giving way and tempting the cavalry farther out into the plain.

The Afghans numbered only about two hundred horsemen, but it was quite evident from their tactics that they had a much larger body in reserve, and Major Atherton was decidedly perplexed as to what he should do. For if he pursued them too far, he might be cut off from his own men; if, on the other hand, he made a dash and rode them down before they could get clear, he might cut them off from their main body, and so clip the enemy's wings.

The enemy settled the question for him. Just as he was looking round for the first sign of Forrester and the guns in the pass, the plain suddenly swarmed with Afghans. From every quarter they bore down on him, horse and foot, and even guns, seeming almost to spring, like the teeth of Cadmus, from the earth.

It was no time for hesitation or doubt. Retreat was out of the question. Equally hopeless was it to warn the troops who were coming up. There was nothing for it but to stand at bay till the main body came up, and then, if they were left to do it, fight their way out and join forces.

The major therefore brought his men to a corner of the rocks, where on two sides, at any rate, attack would be difficult; and there, ordering them to dismount and form square, stood grimly.

A cruel half-hour followed. Man after man of that little band went down before the dropping fire of the enemy. Had the guns been able to command the position, they would have fallen by tens and scores. Major Atherton, in the middle of the square, had his horse shot under him before five minutes were past. Alas! there was no lack of empty saddles to supply the loss, for before a quarter of an hour had gone by, out of a dozen officers scarcely half remained.

Still they stood, waiting for the first boom of the guns at the head of the pass, and often tempted to break away

from their posts and die fighting. For of all a soldier's duties, that of standing still under fire is the hardest.

Captain Forrester, dashing up the defile at the head of the artillery, had been prepared to find a lively skirmish in progress between his own comrades and the handful of Afghans who were luring them on. But when, on emerging on to the plain, he found himself and the gnns more than half surrounded by the enemy, and no sign anywhere of Atherton, he felt that the " brush " was likely to be a very stiff one.

The Afghans had set their hearts on those guns ; that was evident by the wild triumphant yell with which they charged down on them. Forrester had barely time to order a halt and swing the foremost gun into action when a pell-mell scrimmage was going on in the very midst of the gunners. The first shot fired wildly did little or no execution, but it warned Atherton that his time was come, and signalled to the troops still toiling up the pass what to expect when they got through.

That fight round the guns was the most desperate of the day. The Afghans knew that to capture them as they stood, meant the certain annihilation of the British troops as they defiled into the plain. Forrester knew it, too.

Unlike Atherton, he had no protected sides. The enemy was all round him. The little troop at his command was barely able to cover one side of the square ; and the gunners, obliged to fight hand to hand where they stood, were powerless to advance a step. Every moment was golden. Already a distant bugle note announced that Atherton's horse had broken loose, and were somewhere within reach—probably cutting their way through the guns. And within a few minutes the head of the column ascending the defile would also come upon the scene. Hold the guns till then, and all might yet be safe.

So decided Captain Forrester, as with a cheery smile on his handsome face he shouted to his men to hold out, and fought like a lion beside the foremost gun.

The Afghans, baffled by the stubborn resistance, and aware of the danger of delay, hurled themselves upon that

devoted little band with a fury before which nothing could stand. Man after man dropped across his gun; but still Forrester shouted to his men and swung his sabre. It was no time for counting heads. He hardly knew whether, when he shouted, thirty, or twenty, or only ten shouted back. All he knew was the enemy had not got the guns yet, and that was sufficient!

A bugle! Five minutes more, and they might still laugh at the foe. The bugle-note came from Atherton's men, who at the first sound of the gun had vaulted with a cheer to their horses and dashed towards the sound. Many a brave comrade they left behind them, and many more dropped right and left as they cut their way forward. Atherton, at their head, peered eagerly through the dust and smoke. All he could see was a surging mass of human beings, in the midst of which it was impossible to discern anything but the flash of sabres, and at one spot a few British helmets among the turbans of the enemy. That was enough for Major Atherton. Towards that spot he waved on his men, and ordered his bugler to sound a rousing signal. The bugler obeyed, and fell at the major's side before the note had well ceased!

The struggle round the guns increased and blackened. One after another the British helmets went down, and the wild shouts of the Afghans rose triumphantly above them.

At length Atherton saw a tall figure, bareheaded and black with smoke, spring upon a gun-carriage, and with the butt end of a carbine fell two or three of the enemy who scrambled up to dislodge him.

Atherton knew that form among a thousand, and he knew too that Forrester was making his last stand.

"Cheer, men, and come on!" cried he to his men, rising in his stirrups and leading the shout.

The head of the column, just then emerging from the gorge, heard that shout, and answered it with a bugle flourish, as they fixed bayonets and rushed forward to charge. At the same moment, a cheer and the boom of a gun on the left proclaimed that the other half of the column had at that moment

reached the plain, and were also bearing down on the enemy's flank.

But Atherton saw and heeded nothing but that tall heroic figure on the carriage. At the first sound of the troopers' shout Forrester had turned his head, smiling, and raised his carbine aloft, as though to wave answer to the cheer. So he stood for a moment. Then he reeled and fell back upon the gun he had saved.

CHAPTER XVII

An Official Report

SCARFE, on the return of the skating party to Wildtree, found himself the hero of the hour. Whether the risk he ran in rescuing his old schoolfellow from his icy bath had been great or small, it had resulted in saving Jeffreys' life, and that was quite sufficient to make a hero of him. Percy, easily impressed by the daring of any one else, and quite overlooking his own share in the rescue, was loud in his praises.

"How jolly proud you must feel!" said he. "I know I should if I'd saved a fellow's life. That's never my luck!"

"You lent a hand," said Scarfe, with the complacency of one who can afford to be modest.

And, to do Scarfe justice, until he heard himself credited with the lion's share of the rescue, he had been a little doubtful in his own mind as to how much of it he might justly claim.

"Oh," said Percy, "a lot I did! You might as well say Raby lent a hand by lending Jeff her shawl."

"I was the cause of it all," said Raby. "But you forget dear old Julius; I'm sure he lent a hand."

"The dog was rather in the way than otherwise," said Scarfe; "dogs always are on the ice."

Jeffreys, as he walked silently beside them, could afford to smile at this last remark. But in other respects he found little cause for smiling. He was not yet a purified being, and even the peril he had been in had not cast out the fires of pride and temper that lurked within him.

It now stung him with an unspeakable misery to find that

he was supposed to owe his life to one whom he so thoroughly mistrusted and dreaded as Scarfe. He persuaded himself that it was all a delusion—that he could easily have extricated himself without anybody's aid but that of the faithful Julius; that Scarfe had run absolutely no risk in crawling out to him on the ladder; that, in short, he owed him nothing—if, indeed, he did not owe him resentment for allowing himself to be credited with a service which he had no right to claim.

Ungrateful and unreasonable, you will say, and certainly not betokening a proper spirit in one so recently in great danger. Jeffreys, as he walked moodily along, was neither in a grateful nor reasonable mood, nor did he feel chastened in spirit; and that being so, he was too honest to pretend to be what he was not.

To any one less interested, there was something amusing in the manner in which Scarfe took his new and unexpected glory. At first he seemed to regard it doubtfully, and combated it by one or two modest protestations. Then, becoming more used to the idea, it pleased him to talk a little about the adventure, and encourage the others to recall the scene. After that it seemed natural to him to be a little languid and done-up by his exertions, and, as a hero, to establish a claim on Raby's admiration. And finally, being quite convinced he was a hero of the first water, he regarded Jeffreys with condescension, and felt a little surprise that he should remain both silent and apparently disdainful.

As Raby was beforehand with her in blaming herself, the wind was taken out of Mrs. Rimbolt's sails in that quarter, even had she been disposed to let out in that direction. But it was so much more convenient and natural to blame Jeffreys, that the good lady was never in a moment's doubt upon the subject.

"How excessively careless of him!" said she; "the very one of the party, too, whom we expected to keep out of danger. It is a mercy every one of you was not drowned."

"It's a mercy he wasn't drowned himself," said Percy; "so he would have been if it hadn't been for Scarfe."

"It was a very noble thing of Mr. Scarfe," said Mrs. Rimbolt. "I'm sure, Louisa, my dear, you must be proud of your boy."

"He jolly well deserves a Royal Humane medal, and I mean to write and get him one."

"Don't be a young duffer," said the hero, by no means displeased at the threat; "they would laugh at the notion."

"Would they? If they didn't give you one, we'd make them laugh on the wrong side of their faces. I know that," replied the boy.

"You know, auntie, it was I broke the ice," said Raby. "Mr. Jeffreys did not come to that part till he heard it crack."

"That is the ridiculously foolish part of it; he might have known that he ought to keep off when he heard it crack. Any sensible person would."

"Perhaps," said Raby, colouring, "he imagined I was in danger."

"You are a foolish child, Raby, to talk such nonsense, and should be thankful it was not you who fell in. I hope, Mr. Scarfe," added she, "that Mr. Jeffreys is grateful to you for your heroic service to him."

"There is nothing to be grateful for," said Scarfe, in an off-hand way; "indeed, I am afraid Jeffreys is rather offended with me for what I have done than otherwise."

"He could not be so base, my boy," said his mother, "when he owes you his life."

"After all," said Scarfe, with interesting resignation, "it really does not matter. All I know is, if it were all to happen over again I should do just the same thing."

With which noble sentiment the hero was borne off to his room, where a hot bath, warm clothing, a rousing fire, and steaming cordials somewhat consoled him for his self-sacrificing exertions.

After dinner Mrs. Rimbolt could not resist the gratification of seeing honour done to her guest by the object of his devotion; a project which was the more easy of accomplishment as Mr. Rimbolt was from home on that particular evening.

Jeffreys, just beginning to recover himself by the aid of a little hard work, was petrified by Walker's announcement that "the mistress desired that Mr. Jeffreys would step into the drawing-room."

His good breeding was sorely taxed to find an excuse. He was indisposed, certainly; but if he could work in the library, he could bow and scrape in the drawing-room. Mr. Rimbolt, too, was away, and to insult his lady in his absence seemed both cowardly and mean.

"I'll come presently," said he to Walker, and nerved himself desperately for the ordeal.

For he knew what was coming, and was resolved on the part he would play. Whatever he ought to feel, he knew exactly what he did feel; and he was determined he would not be hypocrite enough to pretend anything more.

Whereupon he walked defiantly forth and opened the drawing-room door, this time without knocking.

"Mr. Jeffreys," said Mrs. Rimbolt, feeling that the present was an "occasion," and worked up accordingly, "I have sent for you, as I have no doubt you will wish to express to Mrs. Scarfe the feelings you entertain with regard to her son's brave conduct on the ice to-day."

"Hear, hear, ma!" cried the irreverent Percy, with mock-heroic applause. "I beg leave to second that."

"Percy, be silent, sir! Louisa, my dear, this is Mr. Jeffreys, whose life your son saved."

Mrs. Scarfe put up her glasses and inclined her head languidly in response to Jeffreys' stiff bow.

An awkward silence ensued—so awkward that Percy began to whistle. Mrs. Rimbolt having made a wrong start, had not the tact to mend matters.

"Mrs. Scarfe would be interested to hear, Mr. Jeffreys," said she, after a minute or two, "your impressions of the accident."

"The only impression I had," said Jeffreys solemnly—and he too was worked up, and the master of his nervousness—"was that the water was very cold."

Percy greeted this with a boisterous laugh, which his mother instantly rebuked.

"Surely, Mr. Jeffreys," said she severely, "this is hardly an occasion for a joke."

"It was no joke," replied he with dismal emphasis.

Again Percy enjoyed the sport.

"I should rather think it wasn't by the looks of you when you were fished out!" said he; "you were as blue as salmon!"

"Percy, cease your vulgar talk in this room, please!" said Mrs. Rimbolt, whose equanimity was beginning to evaporate. "Mr. Jeffreys, as we are not likely to be amused by your levity——"

"Excuse me, madam, I am quite serious," said Jeffreys, on whom the apparent jocularity of his last remark had suddenly dawned; "I had no intention of being rude, or treating your question as a joke."

"Then," said Mrs. Rimbolt, slightly appeased in the prospect of gaining her object, "when I tell you Mrs. Scarfe is kind enough to desire to hear about the accident from your own lips, perhaps your good manners will permit you to tell her about it."

"Get upon the chair and give us a speech, Jeff," said the irrepressible Percy; "that's what ma wants."

Jeffreys proceeded to give his version of the affair, distributing the credit of his rescue in the order in which he considered it to be due, and greatly disappointing both Mrs. Rimbolt and her guest by his evident blindness to the heroism of Scarfe. He acknowledged warmly Percy's readiness to come to his help, and his promptitude in going for the ladder, and he did full justice to Julius's share in the affair. As to Scarfe's part, he stated just what had happened, without emotion and without effusiveness.

He despised himself for feeling so chilly on the subject, and would have been glad, for Mrs. Scarfe's sake, had he felt more warmly his obligations to her son. But he spoke as he felt

"You have had a narrow escape from a watery grave," said Mrs. Scarfe, anxious to sum up in the hero's favour, "and my son, I am sure, is thankful to have been the means of saving your life."

Jeffreys bowed.

"I am glad he escaped falling in," said he.

"He had no thought of himself, I am sure," said Mrs. Rimbolt severely, "and claims no thanks beyond that of his good conscience."

"We're going to get him a Royal Humane medal, Jeff," added Percy; "a lot of fellows get it for a good deal less."

"I hope he may get one," said Jeffreys. "You and Julius should have one, too. I thank you all."

This was all that could be extracted from this graceless young man, and the unsatisfactory interview was shortly afterwards terminated by Mrs. Rimbolt's requesting him to go and tell Walker to bring some more coals for the fire.

His conduct was freely discussed when he was gone. Mrs. Rimbolt looked upon it as a slight put upon herself, and was proportionately wrathful. Mrs. Scarfe, more amiable, imagined that it was useless to look for gratitude among persons of Jeffreys' class in life. Scarfe himself said that, from what he knew of Jeffreys, he would have been surprised had he shown himself possessed of any good feelings. Percy, considerably puzzled, suggested that he was "chawed up with his ducking." And Raby, still more perplexed, said nothing, and hardly knew what to think.

The next day, as Scarfe was smoking in the park, Jeffreys overtook him. A night's rest had a good deal softened the librarian's spirit. He was ashamed of himself for not having done his rescuer common justice, and had followed him now to tell him as much.

"Scarfe," said he, "you will have considered I was ungrateful yesterday."

"You were just what I expected you would be."

"I am sorry," said Jeffreys, now beginning to feel he had better far have said nothing, yet resolved, now he had

begun, to go through with it, "and I wish to thank you now."

Scarfe laughed.

"It is I who should be grateful for this condescension," said he sneeringly. "So disinterested, too."

"What do you mean? How could it be otherwise?"

"You have a short memory, Cad Jeffreys. Possibly you have forgotten a little event that happened at Bolsover?"

"I have not forgotten it."

"I dare say you have not thought it worth while to mention it to your employer, Mr. Rimbolt."

"I have not mentioned it."

"Quite so. That is what I mean when I say it is disinterested in you to come and make friends with me."

"That is false," said Jeffreys glowing. "I neither want nor expect that."

"Kind again. At the same time you are not particularly anxious that people here should hear the tragical history of young Forrester?"

"For heaven's sake be silent, Scarfe!" said Jeffreys, to whom the mention of the name, after so many months, came like a blow. "I cannot bear it."

Scarfe laughed.

"Apparently not. All I want to say is, that I believe less in your gratitude than in your fear, and you can spare yourself the trouble of keeping up that farce."

"I am not afraid of you," said Jeffreys, drawing himself up. "Of my own conscience I am; and of the memory of poor young Forrester——"

"Hold your tongue. I have no wish to hear *my* friend's name on your lips."

Jeffreys turned to go.

"Look here," said Scarfe, calling him back, "I want to say one word. I am sufficiently interested in Percy Rimbolt to dislike the influence you use upon him. Your influence upon young boys is not to be trusted, and I warn you to let Percy alone. You are doing him no good as it is."

"Is that all you want to say?" said Jeffreys.

"No. I have my own reason for choosing that you cease to offend Miss Atherton by your attentions. You are no fit companion for her; and she and I——"

Jeffreys turned on his heel, and did not hear the end of the sentence. He marvelled at himself that he had not struck the fellow contemptuously to the ground; and he absolutely smiled in the midst of his misery at the idea of Scarfe taking upon himself the moral upbringing of Percy and the protectorship of Raby!

In the midst of these reflections he became aware of the presence of Raby in the walk in front of him.

The rencontre was unexpected on both sides, and promised to be embarrassing for Jeffreys. Raby, however, came to the rescue.

"Mr. Jeffreys," said she, holding out her hand, "I do hope you are none the worse for yesterday. I was greatly afraid you would catch cold."

"You took the kindest possible way of preventing it," said Jeffreys. "I never enjoyed a meal as much as the one Walker brought me yesterday, and I thank the kind sender."

Raby blushed.

"It was a shame no one else thought of it. But, Mr. Jeffreys, you are thanking me, when it is I who ought to thank you for risking your life for me."

"That is a new version of the story," said Jeffreys. "It was somebody else who risked his life for me, and I know you despise me for appearing so churlish about it."

"I was very sorry indeed for you in the drawing-room last night."

"I deserved no sympathy."

"I fancied you might have gushed a little when you saw how much auntie's heart and Mrs. Scarfe's were set on it. It would not have hurt you."

"I cannot gush, Miss Atherton; but I can value your kindness to me, and I do."

Raby smiled one of her pleasantest smiles.

"I wish I had half your honesty, Mr. Jeffreys. I am always pretending to be something here which I am not, and I get sick of it. I wish I were a man."

"Why? Is honesty confined to the male sex?"

"No; I suppose we can be honest too. But if I was a man I could go and be of some use somewhere; I'm no good to anybody here."

Jeffreys coloured up furiously, and looked as if he would run from the spot. Then, apparently thinking better of it, he looked down at her and said—

"Excuse me, you are."

They walked on a little in silence, then Raby said—

"I am so glad, Mr. Jeffreys, you managed Percy so well about that smoking yesterday; and how well he took it!"

"Of course; he's a gentleman and a fine fellow."

"He forgets how much older Mr. Scarfe is than he, and he imagines it is a fine thing to do whatever others do. But I think it is such a pity he should waste so much time as he does now in the billiard-room and over the fire. Don't you think it is bad for him?"

"I do. The day on the ice yesterday made a new man of him."

"Do try to coax him out, Mr. Jeffreys, you always do him good; and you may be able to pull him up now before he becomes an idler."

"I promise you I will do what I can."

"He ought to be my brother, and not my cousin," said Raby, "I feel so jealous on his account."

"He is fortunate—may I say so?—in his cousin. Here is Mr. Rimbolt."

Mr. Rimbolt had papers in his hand, and looked rather anxious.

Raby, with a daughter's instinct, rushed to him.

"Uncle, have you news from the war? Is anything wrong?"

"Nothing wrong," said her uncle reassuringly; "I brought you this paper to see. It reports that there has been an

encounter with the Afghans near Kandahar, with complete success on the British side and comparatively trifling loss. Particulars are expected almost immediately. I telegraphed to town to get the earliest possible details. Meanwhile, Raby, don't alarm yourself unduly."

"I won't, uncle; but where exactly was the battle?"

"You will see the names mentioned in the telegram. Jeffreys can show you the exact spot in the atlas; we were looking at it the other evening."

Jeffreys thankfully accepted the task. He and Raby spent an hour over the map, talking of the absent soldier, and trying, the one to conceal, the other to allay, the anxiety which the incomplete telegram had aroused.

At the end of the hour Scarfe walked into the library. His face darkened as he saw the two who sat there.

"Miss Atherton," said he, looking not at her, but at Jeffreys, "have you forgotten we were to have a ride this morning?"

"I am so sorry, Mr. Scarfe, but I have a headache, and don't feel as if I could ride to-day. You will excuse me, won't you?"

"Oh, certainly," replied Scarfe; "don't you think a turn in the park will do you good? May I have the pleasure of escorting you?"

Raby said, "Thank you." She was very sorry to disappoint any one, and had no valid excuse against a walk.

"Miss Atherton," said Scarfe, when they had gone some distance, chatting on indifferent topics, "I am anxious just to say a word to you, not in my own interest at all, but your own. Will you forgive me if I do?"

"What is it?" said Raby, mystified.

"I wish to put you on your guard against Jeffreys, who, I see, presumes on his position here to annoy you. You may not perhaps know, Miss Atherton, that not two years ago——"

"Excuse me, Mr. Scarfe," said Raby quietly, stopping in her walk, "I hate talking of people behind their backs. Mr. Jeffreys has never annoyed me; he has been kind to me. Shall we talk of something else?"

"Certainly," said Scarfe, startled at her decided tone. He had laid his plan for a little revelation, and it disconcerted him to see it knocked on the head like this.

However, just then he was not in the humour for making himself obnoxious to Miss Atherton, of whom, being a susceptible youth, he was decidedly enamoured. It was a deprivation, certainly, to find his tongue thus unexpectedly tied with regard to Jeffreys, of whose stay at Wildtree he had calculated on making very short work.

The one comfort was, that there was little enough danger of her seeing in the ill-favoured Bolsover cad anything which need make him—Scarfe—jealous. Doubtless she took a romantic interest in this librarian; many girls have whims of that sort. But the idea of her preferring him to the smart Oxford hero was preposterous.

Jeffreys would still believe in the sword of Damocles which hung above him, and the time might come when Raby would cease to stand between him and his Nemesis.

CHAPTER XVIII

Wild Pike

BEFORE breakfast on the following morning, Scarfe, in fulfilment of a long-standing engagement with a college friend to spend a day with him, rode off to catch the train at Overstone, and consequently was not present when the post arrived, and with it a telegram from London for Mr. Rimbolt. Raby, who had been on the watch, could scarcely allow her uncle time to examine its contents before claiming it; and had it contained bad news, the chance of breaking them would have been out of the question. But it did not contain bad news. On the contrary, as Raby devoured the few official lines she became radiant with pride and happiness. The telegram was a copy of a dispatch received the evening before at the War Office: —

" News is to hand of a sharp brush with the Afghans on the 4th inst. at ——, two days' march from Kandahar. About midday the — Hussars, commanded by Major Atherton, in advance of the main body, encountered and dislodged from a defile on the right bank of the river a considerable body of the enemy, who fled to the plain. It becoming evident the enemy was at hand in force, a battery of field guns was pushed forward, under the escort of a troop of Hussars; and the main body followed in two columns. The cavalry meanwhile, having cleared the defile and chased the enemy into the plain beyond, became involved in a desperate scrimmage, the

Afghans having descended in full force into the plain with the evident intention of cutting them off from the main body. Major Atherton, completely hemmed in, made a desperate stand, in which upwards of twenty of his men perished, the gallant officer himself having his horse shot under him. The guns meanwhile, escorted by Captain Forrester, of the — Hussars, gained the head of the defile, where they were immediately surrounded by the enemy. A brilliant resistance here ensued, in which more than half of the escort were killed in their effort to save the guns. Towards the end, Captain Forrester nearly single-handed kept the enemy at bay until the cavalry, breaking through, and joining forces with the two columns of the main body as they emerged on the plain, effectually turned the position and saved the guns. The loss of the enemy was very considerable, and it is considered that this action clears the way to Kandahar, which the troops are expected to occupy in two days without further resistance. Our loss, considering the perilous position of the cavalry and gunners, was comparatively slight. Captain Forrester at the last moment fell after a resistance as heroic as any witnessed in the course of the campaign. Major Atherton received a scratch on the wrist; which, however, is not likely to disable him even temporarily. The main body never came into action at all, and suffered no casualties. A full list of the killed and wounded is appended."

Jeffreys, who found himself almost as eager for news as if he had been personally interested, found it difficult to wait patiently until Mr. Rimbolt came after breakfast to the library.

"Is there news from the war?" he asked.

"Yes—good news. Miss Atherton has the telegram. Her father took part in a very brilliant engagement a day or two ago, which appears to have cleared the way to Kandahar. He was scratched, but not seriously."

Jeffreys received this good news with great satisfaction. It was a relief to him to hear it in the first instance not from

Raby's lips, for he never knew what to do or say on such occasions.

"Miss Atherton must be very proud," said he, returning to his work.

He was not, however, destined to remain long undisturbed. Raby, radiant and excited, entered the library a few minutes later.

"Mr. Jeffreys," said she, "such splendid news. Has uncle told you? I thought you would like to read the telegram; here it is."

Jeffreys looked his congratulations as he took the paper.

"Read it aloud, Mr. Jeffreys," said the happy girl, "I should like to hear how it sounds." Jeffreys smiled and began to read; Raby, who knew it all by heart, seeming to check off every word.

Suddenly, however, in the middle of the narrative the reader started and changed colour, and became unaccountably breathless.

"The guns meanwhile, escorted by ——" he had got so far.

"'Captain Forrester of the — Hussars.' Go on," said Raby.

It needed all his self-command to finish the reading, and when he came to the end and handed back the paper, Raby perceived that his hand shook and his face was deadly pale.

"Why, what is the matter, Mr. Jeffreys?" said she, suddenly alarmed herself; "it is good news, isn't it? and he has only got a scratch!"

"Yes, it is good news; and I congratulate you."

"But you look—perhaps you know some one who has been killed. You never told me you had any friend out there."

"I have not. I think I must be not quite well; will you excuse me?"

And he went out into the open air, leaving Raby very much perplexed and concerned. She was relieved, however, to see him half an hour later starting off with Percy for what,

to judge by their mountain boots and the luncheon box strapped across Jeffreys' shoulders, promised to be a long walk.

Jeffreys' first sensations on finding himself alone had been those of stupefaction. Although all that he knew of Forrester's father was that he had been in India, it never occurred to him now for a moment that the gallant officer mentioned in the telegram could be any other than the father whom he had so cruelly and irreparably wronged. And now once more he seemed suddenly face to face with his crime. He saw before him that fatal scene in the Bolsover meadow; he heard his comrades' howl of execration and saw the boy's white face on the grass turned up to meet his. It seemed but yesterday. Nay, it seemed all to be there that moment; he could feel the keen breeze on his cheek; his eye rested on the boy's cap where he had flung it; he was conscious of Mr. Freshfield's look of horror—he could even see twenty yards away the football lying idle between the goals.

Strange, that the doubtful mention of an officer's name should call it all up thus! But so it was. He even seemed half guilty of that gallant death in Afghanistan. Had he not wronged him worse than death? and now if anywhere the friendless boy, whose whole hope was in his father, should read those lines and find himself orphaned as well as crippled!

Jeffreys in his misery groaned aloud.

"Hullo," said Percy, in the path before him, "you in the blues too! What a jolly sell! Here am I as miserable as an owl, and everybody I meet's miserable too. Scarfe's gone to Sharpfield, and won't be back till late. Raby's so taken up with her precious telegram that she won't look at me. Ma and Mrs. Scarfe, have bagged the pony trap and Appleby, and now you're looking as if you'd just been hung."

"What are you in the blues about?" said Jeffreys, brightening up a bit.

"Oh, everything. It's so slow here, nothing to do. Can't play games all day, and you won't let me smoke, and the library hasn't a single story worth reading, and it's beastly

cold; and upon my word," said the boy, who was genuinely miserable, "I'd as soon go and sit on the top of Wild Pike as fool about here."

"The best thing you could do—I'll go and sit with you," said Jeffreys.

"What!" said the boy, "do you mean it? Will you come?"

"Of course I will; I have nothing special to do to-day, and I've never been up a mountain in winter before."

"We shall get a splendid view. Sure it won't grind you?" said the boy, who, under Scarfe's influence, had come to look upon every exertion as a thing to be shirked.

"My dear fellow, I shall enjoy it, especially with you," said Jeffreys.

"Hurrah—bring Julius too—and I'll get some grub to take. It's only ten now, and it's not dark till after four, so we have a good six hours."

A few minutes later they started, Percy leaving word for his mother that they were going for a long tramp, and would be back for dinner.

It was a perfect winter's day. The air was keen and frosty and promised magnificent views. The wind was not strong enough to be benumbing, and the sun overhead was cheering and now and then even warm.

"Hadn't we better take overcoats, in case it comes on cold at the top?" said Jeffreys as they were starting.

"Oh no—they're a frightful grind to carry, and we are sure to be baked before we get up."

"I think I will take mine," said Jeffreys, "and it will be no bother to carry yours."

Percy protested, but, luckily for them, Jeffreys carried his point.

Wild Pike was one of those mountains, not uncommon in that district, which are approached from the back by a long gradual slope, but on the front present a scooped-out precipitous face, as if broken in half on that side.

It was this steeper side which faced Wildtree, and Percy

would have scorned to approach the monster from any other quarter. From where they stood the narrow path zigzagged for about one thousand feet on to one of the upper shoulders of the mountain. Following this, the track brought them to what seemed like the basin of some old volcano hollowed out under the summit.

It was necessary to cross this depression, and by a narrow ledge at the foot of the great cliff gain the other side, where another zigzag ascent brought them on to the rocky slope leading over a quarter of a mile of huge boulders to the summit.

The passage across the face of the mountain was the most difficult part of the ascent. It lay along a narrow ledge hanging, so it seemed, half-way down the perpendicular cliff which rose out of the hollow, crater-like basin sheer up to the summit.

It was tolerably level, but the narrowness of the track and the precipitous height above and below called for a cool head and a steady foot. In frosty weather like the present it needed special caution, and every step had to be carefully judged on the treacherous path. However, they passed it safely. Julius alone seemed to find it difficult. The dog was strangely awkward to-day.

He slid about where the others walked steadily, and whimpered at obstacles which they seemed scarcely to heed.

" Now for the grub," cried Percy, as they landed safely on the other side. " I say, Jeff, I call that something like a mountain, don't you? I'm quite sorry we're over the worst of it, aren't you? "

" We've got the view to see yet," responded Jeffreys. " We shall be up in half an hour."

" And it will take us as long to come down as to go up to-day," said Jeffreys, " so we ought not to lose much time."

Off they started again after a hurried but highly appreciated meal, in which the dog took only a very moderate share. The remaining portion of the ascent was simple enough. The

zigzag on to the top shoulder was if anything less steep than the lower one, and the path, being rougher underfoot, was less treacherous.

The scramble over the loose rocks at the top on to the cairn was not altogether plain sailing. In summer it was easy enough, but now, with the surface of the great boulders as slippery as glass, it was hardly to be traversed except on the hands and knees.

Poor Julius floundered about pitifully, unable to keep his feet, and disappearing bodily now and then among the interstices of the rocky way. Even Percy and Jeffreys stumbled once or twice awkwardly, and reached the summit with bruised limbs. But *finis coronat opus*, especially on a mountain.

As they sprang up the cairn a view unequalled in grandeur broke upon them. The frosty air was without haze in any quarter. The Scotch hills beyond the border and the broad heaving sea lay apparently equally within reach, and on the farthest western horizon even the fairy-like outline of the distant Irish hills, never visible except in the clearest winter weather, shone out distinctly.

"Isn't it scrumptious?" exclaimed Percy, as he flung himself breathless on to the cairn. "If we had waited a year we couldn't have picked out such a day. Why, that must be Snowdon we see over there, and the high ground out at sea, Holyhead?"

Thus they went on, delightedly recognizing the landmarks north, south, east, and west, and forgetting both the hour and the rising breeze.

"Why, it's two o'clock! cried Percy presently, looking at his watch, and shivering at the same time.

"Put on your coat," said Jeffreys; "the wind's getting up a bit, and we shall have it in our faces going down."

As they started to descend they became aware of a sudden change in the hitherto cloudless day. The western horizon, which had just now been unfolding its distant beauties, seemed lost in a fine haze, which spread north and south,

blotting out one after another the glories of landscape on which they had scarcely ceased to feast their eyes.

" There's a mist out there," said Percy, as they scrambled down the boulders; " I hope to goodness it will keep away from us."

" The wind is a little north-west; it may drive it south of us, but it is spreading at a great rate."

" Never mind; it will be rather a joke if it comes. I could find the way down with my eyes shut, and I've often wanted to be in a regular fog up here," said Percy.

" I don't know what you feel," responded Jeffreys; " but I'm rather glad we brought our coats. Isn't it cold?"

The wind which met them seemed charged with cold, and after a while began to scatter a feathery sleet in their faces.

Percy whistled.

" We didn't bargain for that, I say," said he. " I hope it shuts up before we cross over the ledge down there."

Julius howled dismally. He, too, guessed what this blinding shower-bath foreboded, and stumbled along, miserable and shivering.

The higher zigzag, which had seemed easy enough two hours ago, tried them sorely now. The sleet half blinded them, and the fresh moisture, freezing as it fell, caused them to slip and slide at every step. Still they got down it somehow, and turned to face the narrow track along the cliff. Percy, much as he repined at the change in the elements, felt no doubt as to the possibility of getting over.

" We may have to crawl a bit of the way if this sort of thing goes on," said he, " but it's straight enough sailing."

" Would it be better," suggested Jeffreys, " to go to the top again and get down by the Sharpenholme track?"

" We shouldn't get home till midnight if we did; besides, I don't know the way. We're all right this way if we look sharp."

The wind had now increased to a tempest, and beat against the side of the great cliff with a sound like the sea breaking on an iron-bound shore. They could scarcely hear one another

speak; and poor Julius's whines were drowned in the great clamour.

"Do you mind my going first?" said Percy; "I know the path better than you."

Jeffreys nodded, and they started. The first step they took on that ledge threatened for a moment to be their last. The wind, gathering fury every moment, beat Percy to his knees, and nearly sent Jeffreys staggering over the ledge.

"We shall have to crawl," said Percy. "It's no use waiting. The wind and sleet are going to make a night of it, and we shall gain nothing by waiting."

The start was begun again—this time cautiously and on all-fours. Even so the wind seemed once or twice as if it would sweep them from the ledge. Yard by yard they crawled on. The driving mist fell like a pall over the mountain, and in a few minutes they could not even see a yard in front of them. Had the wind blown crosswise, or in any other way than that in which it came, they would have been swept off before twenty yards were accomplished. As it was, they were almost pinned to the cliff by the fury of the blast.

They must have proceeded a quarter of the way across, and had reached a spot where the ledge rose slightly. Even up this slight incline, with the mist freezing under them, it was impossible to crawl; and Percy, drawing himself cautiously to his feet, attempted to stand.

As he did so, the wind, gathering itself into a furious blast, caught him and hurled him against the rocky wall. He recoiled with a sharp cry of pain, and next moment would have fallen into the abyss beneath, had not Jeffreys' strong arm caught him and held him. His legs were actually off the ledge, and for a moment it seemed as if both he and his protector were doomed. But with a tremendous effort the prostrate Jeffreys swung him back on to the track.

"Are you hurt?" he called.

"My arm," said Percy. "I'm afraid I can't get on. I'll try."

But the attempt only called up a fresh exclamation of pain.

"We must wait," said Jeffreys. "Try to sit up, old fellow. I'll help you."

It was evident that the boy's arm, if not broken, was so severely damaged as to render it powerless.

"I could stay here, I think," said he, "if you went on, Jeff."

"Nonsense!" said Jeffreys; "we'll send Julius to fetch help. Here, Julius, good dog," said he, patting the dog's head and pointing down to the valley, "go and fetch them here. Fetch Appleby, and Walker, and Mr. Rimbolt. Go along, good fellow."

The dog, who had been crawling behind them, looked wistfully at his master and licked the hand that caressed him. Then, stepping carefully across them as they sat with their backs to the rock and their feet beyond the edge of the path, he departed.

He was out of sight almost a yard away, but they heard him whine once as the wind dashed him against the cliff.

"Julius, good dog, fetch them!" shouted Jeffreys into the mist.

A faint answering bark came back.

Next moment, through the storm, came a wild howl, and they heard him no more.

Jeffreys guessed only too well what that howl meant; but he never stirred, as with his arm round Percy, and his cloak screening him from the wind, he looked hopelessly out into the night and waited.

CHAPTER XIX

Scarfe Promises to Remember

"JEFF," said Percy, after a minute or two, "it's nonsense your staying here to get frozen; do go on."

"No, old fellow; I prefer your company to my own."

"But, Jeff, we may not last out till the morning."

"We won't give it up yet, though."

Jeffreys had great faith in the caloric of hope, especially for a boy of Percy's temperament. For himself he saw enough to guess that their position was a desperate one. The ledge on which they sat was narrow and slanting, and the wind, shifting gradually to the west, began to get round them menacingly, and cause them now and then to grip at the stones while some specially furious gust blew past. Add to that, Percy's arm was probably broken, and, despite a makeshift bandage and sling, adjusted at imminent peril of being swept away in the operation, increasingly painful. The mist wrapped them like a winding-sheet, and froze as it fell.

"How long will Julius take getting down?" asked the boy.

"Not long," said Jeffreys, with a shudder, not wholly caused by the cold.

"An hour? He could bring them up in three hours, couldn't he?"

"Less, perhaps. We can hold out for three hours."

"Jeff, old fellow, do go; what *is* the use of you staying?"

"Harder work for the wind to lift two of us than one. It can't last long, I'm certain; it's chopping already."

They relapsed into silence, and listened to the storm as it dashed on the cliffs above them.

A quarter of an hour passed. Then Jeffreys felt the boy's head drop on his shoulder.

"Percy, old man, no sleeping," said he, raising his head.

"I'm not sleeping; only wondering where Julius is."

But his voice was drowsy, and the words drawled out slowly and dreamily.

"Perhaps he's down the lower zigzag now," said Jeffreys, giving his companion a shake, under pretext of readjusting the wraps.

"I guess he'll go to Raby first," said Percy. "Won't she be scared?"

"She will probably go to your father, and he'll get Appleby and Kennedy and some of the men, and they'll—Percy! hold up your head!"

"Scarfe would like to get engaged to Raby, but she would sooner——"

"Percy, old man, you're talking rubbish. Unless you sit up and keep awake we shall both come to grief."

"I'll try," said the boy, "but I don't know how."

"Tell me something about your year at Rugby. I want to hear about it so much. What form were you in?"

Then followed a desperate half-hour of cross-examination, Jeffreys coming down with a question at the slightest symptom of drowsiness, and Percy, with all the cunning of a "somnomaniac," taking time to think before each answer, and even shirking a syllable here or there in order to snatch a wink.

The daylight slowly faded out of the mist, but still the wind howled and shook them on their narrow perch at every gust. Jeffreys, with dismay, found his limbs growing cramped and stiff, boding ill, unless relief soon came, for the possibility of moving at all.

Surely, though, the wind was abating. The dash over-

head sounded a trifle less deafening; and the driving sleet, which an hour ago had struck on their faces, now froze their ears.

Yes, the wind was shifting and falling.

In the half-minute which it took Jeffreys to make this discovery Percy had once more fallen asleep, and it required a shake more prolonged than ever to arouse him.

"What!" said he, as he slowly raised his head, "are they here? Is father there?"

"No, old boy, but the wind is going down, and we may be able to move soon. Where did you field in that cricket match you were telling me of?"

"Short leg, and I made two catches."

"Bravo! Were they hard ones? Tell me."

So for another half-hour this struggle with sleep went on. Jeffreys had more to do than keep his companion awake. He accompanied every question with a change of position of his knees and arms, that he might be able when the time came to use his limbs. It was little enough scope he had for any movement on that narrow ledge, but he lost no chance, and his self-imposed fidgets helped not only himself but Percy.

At last the roar on the cliffs changed into a surly soughing, and the gusts edged slowly but surely round behind the great buttress of the mountain.

"Percy," said Jeffreys, "we must try a move. Can you hold yourself steady while I try to get up?"

Percy was wide awake in an instant.

"I can hold on, but my other arm is no good for scrambling."

"I'll see to that, only hold on while I get up."

It was a long and painful operation; every joint and muscle seemed to be congealed. At length, however, by dint of a terrible effort, he managed to draw up his feet and even to stand on the path. He kicked up the earth so as to make a firm foothold, and then addressed himself to the still more difficult task of raising the stiff and crippled Percy.

How he did it, and how he half dragged, half carried him

back along the ledge to the firmer ground of the upper zigzag path, he never knew. He always counted it as one of the miracles of his life, the work of that stronger than human arm which had already helped him along his path, and which in this act showed that it still was with him. To stand even on that steep mountain path was, after the peril of that fearful ledge, like standing on a broad paved road.

"Where next?" said Percy.

"Over the top and down by the Sharpenholme track. Do you see the moon is coming out through the mist?"

"All serene!"

The heroism of that night's adventure was not all absorbed by the elder traveller. The boy who with indomitable hopefulness toiled up that steep ascent with a broken arm bandaged to his side, making nothing of his pain, was a type of English boy happily still to be met with, giving promise of men of the right stuff yet to come to maintain the good name of their country.

They were not much in the humour for admiring the wonderful beauty of the scene as the mist gradually cleared and above them rose the full white moon flooding the mountain and the hills beyond with its pure light. They welcomed the light, for it showed them the way; but they would have sold the view twenty times over for a pot of hot coffee.

At the top they met the tail end of the gale spending its little remaining force on the mountain's back. It seemed like a balmy zephyr compared with the tempest of a few hours ago.

The descent down the broad grass track with its slight covering of snow towards Sharpenholme had little difficulty; but the jolting tried Percy's arm as the steep climb with all its exertion had not done.

Jeffreys noticed the boy's steps become more unsteady, and felt him lean with increasing heaviness on his arm.

"Percy, old boy, you are done up."

"No—I—Suppose we rest a minute or two; I shall be all right"

But while he spoke he staggered faintly and would have fallen but for Jeffreys' arm in his.

"I think if you went on," said he, "I could rest a bit and follow slowly."

Jeffreys' answer was curt and decisive.

He took the boy up in his arms as if he had been a baby, and, despite all protestations, carried him.

On level ground and under ordinary circumstances it would have been a simple matter. For Jeffreys was brawny and powerful; and the light weight of the slender, wiry boy was nothing to him. But on that slippery mountain-side, after the fatigue and peril of the afternoon, it was as much as he could do to stagger forward under the burden.

Yet—was it quite unnatural?—a strange sort of happiness seemed to take possession of him as he felt this helpless boy's form in his arms, the head drooped on his shoulder, and the poor bruised arm tenderly supported in his hand. There seemed hope in the burden; and in that brotherly service a promise of expiation for another still more sacred service which had been denied him!

He tramped down that long gradual slope in a contented dream, halting often to rest, but never losing heart. Percy, too exhausted to remonstrate, yielded himself gratefully, and lay only half conscious in his protector's arms, often fancying himself at home in bed or lolling idly in the summer fields.

It may have been midnight, or later still, when Jeffreys, looking beyond the shadows projected by the moon in front of him, perceived a gleam of light far down in the valley.

"Probably," thought he, "some honest shepherd, after his day's work, is happily going to rest. Think of a bed, and a pillow, and a blanket!"

But no, the light—the lights, there were two—were moving—moving rapidly and evenly.

Jeffreys stood still to listen. The wind had long since dropped into rest, and the clear night air would have carried a sound twice the distance. Yes, it was a cart or a carriage, and he could even detect the clatter of the horses on the

hard road. Possibly some benighted wagoner, or a mail cart.

He raised a shout which scared the sleeping rabbits in their holes and made the hill across the valley wake with echoes. The lights still moved on. . He set Percy down tenderly on the grass with his coat beneath him. Then, running with all his speed, he halved the distance which separated him and the road, and shouted again.

This time the clatter of the hoofs stopped abruptly and the lights stood still.

Once more he shouted, till the night rang with echoes. Then, joyful sound ! there rose from the valley an answering call, and he knew all was safe.

In a few minutes he was back again where Percy, once more awake, was sitting up, bewildered, and listening to the echoes which his repeated shouts still kept waking.

"It's all right, old fellow ; there's a carriage."

"They've come to look for us. I can walk, Jeff, really."

"Are you sure ?"

"Yes, and they'd be so scared if they saw me being carried."

So they started forward, the answering shouts coming nearer and nearer at every step.

"That's Appleby," said Percy, as a particularly loud whoop fell on their ears. It was, and with him Mr. Rimbolt and Scarfe.

When darkness came, and no signs of the pedestrians, the usual uneasiness had prevailed at Wildtree, increased considerably by Walker's and Raby's report as to the mountaineering garb in which the missing ones had started. The terrible tempest which had attacked the face of Wild Pike had swept over Wildtree too, and added a hundredfold to the alarm which, as hour passed hour, their absence caused. Scarfe, arriving at home about ten o'clock, found the whole family in a state of panic. Mr. Rimbolt had been out on the lower slopes of the mountain, and reported that a storm raged there before which nothing could stand. The only hope was that they had been descending the back of the mountain, and

taken refuge somewhere in the valley for the night. The carriage was ordered out, and Mr. Rimbolt and Scarfe started on what seemed a forlorn hope. For an hour or two they passed and repassed the valley road, inquiring at every cottage and farm without result.

At last, just as they were resolving to give it up for the night, Appleby pulled up the horses suddenly, and said he had heard a shout. Instantly they jumped out and shouted back; and now, following the direction of the voice, far up the great slope, they met Jeffreys, with the boy leaning on his arm safe, but almost exhausted.

Neither of them retained a vivid recollection of that drive home. Jeffreys was vaguely conscious of them calling on the way for the doctor, and taking him along in the carriage. He also heard Scarfe say something to Mr. Rimbolt in tones of commiseration, in which something was added about the inconsiderateness and untrustworthiness of Jeffreys. But for the rest he reclined back in his seat, scarcely conscious of anything but the rest and warmth.

At Wildtree, the now familiar scene of the whole household gathered panic-struck on the threshold drove him precipitately to his room. He knew what to expect if he stayed there.

Jeffreys dropped asleep with the dog's howl ringing weirdly in his ears. In his dreams it seemed to change into that still more terrible howl which had stunned him long ago on the Bolsover meadow. It followed him as he carried young Forrester in his arms across that fatal ledge. It was pitch-dark; and on the ledge Scarfe stood to drive him back. Then suddenly a new bright path seemed to open at his side, into which he stepped with his precious burden. And as he did so he saw, far off, Raby standing at the end of the way.

It was ten o'clock when he awoke; but the house was still asleep. Only a few servants were stirring; and even Walker had taken advantage of the occasion to "sleep in."

Jeffreys was tough and hardy; and the night's rest had done more for him than twenty doctors. He got up, shook

himself, and behold his limbs were strong under him, and his head was clear and cool. He dressed himself quietly and descended to the kitchen, where he begged an early breakfast of the servants. Then he sallied forth with his stick towards Wild Pike.

The grand pile on this bright winter's morning looked almost hypocritically serene and benignant. The sunlight bathed the stern cliff which yesterday had buffeted back the wind with a roar as fierce as itself; and in the quiet spring-like air the peaceful bleating of sheep was the only sound to be heard on the steep mountain-side.

But Jeffreys did not turn his steps upward. On the contrary, he kept to the lowest track in the valley, and took the path which led him nearest to the base of that terrible wall of rock. A hard scramble over the fallen stones brought him to a spot where, looking up, the top of the wall frowned down on him from a sheer height of five hundred feet, while halfway down, like a narrow scratch along the face of the cliff, he could just detect the ledge on which last night they had sat out the storm.

There, among the stones, shattered and cold, lay all that remained of the brave Julius. His fate must have overtaken him before he had gone twenty yards on his desperate errand, and almost before that final howl reached his master's ears all must have been over.

Jeffreys, as he tenderly lifted his lost friend in his arms, thought bitterly and reproachfully of the dog's strange conduct yesterday—his evident depression and forebodings of evil—the result, no doubt, of illness, but making that last act of self-devotion all the more heroic.

He made a grave there at the base of that grand cliff, and piled up a little cairn to mark the last resting-place of his friend. Then, truly a mourner, he returned slowly to Wildtree.

At the door he encountered Mrs Rimbolt, who glared at him and swept past.

"How is Percy this morning?" he inquired.

"No thanks to you, Mr. Jeffreys," said the lady, with a double venom in her tones, "he is alive."

"His arm, is it——?"

"Go to your work, sir," said the lady; "I have no wish to speak to you."

Jeffreys bowed and retreated. He had expected such a reception, and just now it neither dismayed nor concerned him.

On the staircase he met Raby. She looked pale and anxious, but brightened up as she saw him.

"Mr. Jeffreys," said she, "are you really up, and none the worse?"

"I am well, thank you," said he, "but very anxious to hear about Percy."

"He has had a bad night with his arm, but the doctor says he is going on all right. What a terrible adventure you had. Percy told me a little of it. Oh, Mr. Jeffreys, it is all my fault!"

Jeffreys could not help smiling.

"By what stretch of ingenuity do you make that out?"

"It was I suggested your coaxing Percy out, you know; I might have been the death of you both."

"You did not send the wind, did you, or the mist? If you did, of course you are quite entitled to all the credit."

"Don't laugh about it, please. Percy was telling me how if it had not been for you——"

"He would never have been in any danger. Perhaps he is right. By the way, Miss Atherton, is there any chance of seeing him?"

"He has asked for you already; but auntie, I believe, would have a fit if you went near him. She seems to consider you are his evil genius; instead of being just the opposite. Tell me how Julius is—he went with you, did he not?"

"I have been out this morning to bury Julius at the place where he fell."

Raby, already unduly excited by the events of the past few days, broke into tears, and at the same moment Scarfe, descending the stairs, stood before them.

He looked first at Jeffreys, next at the girl. Then, taking her arm, he said—

"What is the matter? May I take you downstairs?"

"Oh no," she cried, pushing away his hand, and dashing the tears from her eyes.

"Mr. Jeffreys, I am so sorry, do forgive me!" and she ran upstairs to her own room.

Jeffreys and Scarfe stood facing one another.

"What is the meaning of this?" said the latter wrathfully.

"It would not interest you. I was telling Miss Atherton about my dog."

"Hang your dog! Did not I tell you that I did not choose for you to obtrude yourself on Raby?"

"You did, and I should be sorry to obtrude myself on any one, whether you choose it or not."

"You appear to forget, Cad Jeffreys——"

"I forget nothing—not even that I am keeping you from your breakfast."

And he quitted the scene.

Later in the morning, as he was working in the library, Mr. Rimbolt entered and greeted him cordially.

"Jeffreys, my dear fellow, you are constantly adding new claims on my gratitude. What can I say to you now to thank you for your heroism yesterday, about which Percy has just told us?"

"Pray say nothing, and discount Percy's story heavily, for he was the hero. With his broken arm and in all the danger he never lost heart for a moment."

"Yes, he is a brave boy, too. But I came now to tell you he is asking for you. Will you come and see him?"

Jeffreys followed the father gratefully to the sick-chamber. At the door he encountered Mrs. Rimbolt, who, having evidently been present at the boy's narrative, was pleased to regard him almost graciously, and, delightfully ignoring the previous encounter, to wish him good morning. Percy looked hot and feverish, but brightened up at once as he caught sight of his protector.

"Hullo, old Jeff," said he, "isn't this all nonsense? They say I'm in for a mild congestion, and shall have to stick in bed for a fortnight. Just sit down; do you mind, and stay with me. You've pulled me through so far; you may as well finish the job."

Thus informally, and without consulting anybody, Jeffreys was constituted nurse-in-chief in the sick-chamber. The boy would tolerate no discussion or protest on the part of the authorities. He must have old Jeff. Bother a hospital nurse, bother the doctor, bother Scarfe, bother everybody. He wanted Jeff; and if Jeff couldn't come he didn't mean to take his medicine or do anything he ought to do. Walker had better put up a chair-bed in the dressing-room for Jeff, and Jeff and he (Percy) could have their grub together. Of course all the others could come and see him, especially Raby—but he meant to have Jeff there for good, and that was flat.

Thus this selfish young invalid arranged for his own pleasure, and upset all the sober arrangements of his friends.

Jeffreys delightedly accepted his new duty, and faced the jealousy of Mrs. Rimbolt and Scarfe unflinchingly. It was certainly an unfortunate position for the fond mother; and little wonder if in her mind Jeffreys' brave service should be blotted out in the offence of being preferred before herself in the sick-chamber. She readily lent an ear to the insinuations which Scarfe, also bitterly hurt, freely let out, and persuaded herself miserably that her boy was in the hands of an adventurer who had cajoled not only the boy but the father, and in short personated the proverbial viper at the fireside.

So the fortnight passed. Percy turned the corner; and the time for the departure of Mrs. Scarfe and her son drew near.

Percy on the evening before they went had been less bright than usual, and had alarmed Jeffreys by a slight return of feverishness. He had just dropped off to sleep, and seemed about to settle quietly for the night, when the door opened and Scarfe came in.

Jeffreys was there in an instant with his hand raised in warning.

"Hush, please," said he, "he has just gone over."

"Whom are you telling to hush? you canting brute!" said Scarfe, raising his voice in a passion unusual for him. "Let me come in, do you hear?"

And he moved forward, as if to force his way into the room.

Jeffreys caught him by the two elbows and lifted him bodily out into the landing, and then stood with his back to the door.

Scarfe, livid with rage, made no attempt to get back into the room. Turning on his adversary, he said between his teeth—

"I shall remember this," and departed.

CHAPTER XX

A Polite Letter-Writer

SCARFE descended to the drawing-room, where he found Mrs. Rimbolt alone.

"I am so sorry you are going," said she. "Your visit has been greatly spoiled, I fear. You must come to us at Easter, when we shall be in London, you know."

"Thank you; I shall be glad to come. I hope to find Percy well again. I went to wish him good-bye just now, but was pretty abruptly denied admission, so I must ask you to say good-bye for me."

"Dear me, it is very annoying. I cannot understand the craze the boy has taken for this companion of his. I am so sorry you should have been annoyed."

"I assure you I am far more annoyed on Percy's account than my own. I happen to know something of Jeffreys before he came to Wildtree. To tell you the truth, Mrs. Rimbolt, I don't think he is a safe companion for Percy at all."

"I have long felt the same; but what is to be done, Mr. Scarfe? Mr. Rimbolt has almost the same craze as Percy for this librarian of his, and I have really no voice in the matter. He contrives to leave nothing definite to lay hold of; I should be thankful if he did. But it is most uncomfortable to feel that one's own son is perhaps being ruined under this roof."

"It must be. It is no business of mine, of course, except that I am fond of Percy, and should be sorry to see harm come to him; and knowing what I do——"

At that moment Mr Rimbolt, with Mrs. Scarfe, entered the room.

" What secrets are you two talking ? " said the latter.

" Your son was just telling me how fond he is of Percy ; and I am sure it will be a great loss to Percy when he is gone. He has promised me to come to see us in town at Easter."

" It is a satisfaction that you can leave with the assurance that Percy is virtually well again," said Mr. Rimbolt. " Really, I do not know how we should have got on without Mr. Jeffreys to nurse him. I never knew such devotion. He has never wanted for a thing all the time ; and Jeffreys' influence is of the highest and manliest sort. Percy will be able to reckon this illness among the blessings of his life."

Mr. Rimbolt spoke feelingly and warmly.

Scarfe and Mrs. Rimbolt exchanged glances ; and the conversation shortly afterwards turned to the journey before the travellers.

Scarfe had come down to the drawing-room resolved, cost what it would, to settle scores with Jeffreys there and then by denouncing him to the family on whose favour he was dependent ; and had Mr. Rimbolt's entrance been delayed a few minutes, Mrs. Rimbolt would have known all about young Forrester. Once again, however, he was stopped in time, and a few moments' reflection convinced him it was as well.

Raby, he knew, whatever she might think of Jeffreys, would never forgive the informant who should be the means of turning him out of Wildtree, still less would Percy. Nor was Mr. Rimbolt likely to esteem his guest more highly in the capacity of tale-bearer ; and he decidedly wished to " keep in " with all three.

And there was another reason still.

Scarfe was at the bottom of his heart not quite a villain, and much as he detested Jeffreys, and longed to be revenged—for what injury do certain minds feel half so much as that which one man commits in being better than another ?—he had an uncomfortable suspicion in his mind that after all Jeffreys was not quite the miscreant he tried to imagine him.

That he was guilty in the matter of young Forrester there was no doubt; but much as he should have liked to believe it, he could not be quite sure that the accident at Bolsover was the result of a deliberate murderous design, or indeed of anything more than the accidental catastrophe of a blundering fit of temper—criminal, if you like, and cowardly, but not fiendish. And his conscience made coward enough of him just now to cause him to hesitate before plunging into ruin one who, hateful as he was to him, was after all a poor wretch, miserable enough for any one.

Not having done what he intended to do, Scarfe felt decidedly virtuous, and considered himself entitled to any amount of credit for his forbearance!

It seemed a pity Raby should not know of this noble effort of self-denial.

"Miss Atherton," said he, just as they were about to separate for the night, "I'm afraid you will have forgotten all about me when you see me next."

"You are very uncomplimentary, Mr. Scarfe."

"I do not mean to be; and I'm sure I shall not forget you."

"Thank you. This has been a very eventful visit."

"It has; but I shall never regret that day on the ice, although I fear I made one enemy by what I did."

"You don't understand Mr. Jeffreys; he is very shy and proud."

"I understand him quite well, and wish for Percy's sake every one here did too. But I am not going to disobey you, and talk of people behind their backs, Miss Atherton. I am sure you will approve of that."

"I do; I never like it unless it is something nice of them."

"Then I certainly had better not talk to you about Mr. Jeffreys," said Scarfe with a sneer, which did him more damage in Raby's eyes than a torrent of abuse from his lips. "Do you know you have never yet shown me the telegram you had about your father's last battle? It came the morning I was away, you know."

"Yes. I fancied perhaps you did not care to see it, as you

never asked me," said Raby, producing the precious paper from her dress, where she kept it like a sort of talisman.

"How could you think that?" said Scarfe reproachfully, who had quite forgotten to ask to see it.

He took the paper and glanced down it.

"Hullo!" said he, starting as Jeffreys had done. "Captain Forrester! I wonder if that's poor young Forrester's father?"

"Who is poor young Forrester?" inquired Raby.

Scarfe read the paper to the end, and then looked up in well-simulated confusion.

"Poor young Forrester? Oh—well, I dare say Jeffreys could tell you about him. The fact is, Miss Atherton, if I am not allowed to talk of people behind their backs it is impossible for me to tell you the story of poor young Forrester."

"Then," said Raby, flushing, as she folded up the paper, "I've no desire to hear it."

Scarfe could see he had gone too far.

"I have offended you," said he, "but really I came upon the name so unexpectedly that——"

"Do you expect to be working hard this term at Oxford?" said Raby, doing the kindest thing in turning the conversation.

It was hardly to be wondered at if she retired that night considerably perplexed and disturbed. There was some mystery attaching to Jeffreys, which, if she was to set any store by Scarfe's insinuations, was of a disgraceful kind. And the agitation which both Scarfe and Jeffreys had shown on reading the telegram seemed to connect this Captain Forrester, or rather his son, whom Scarfe spoke of as "poor young Forrester," with the same mystery. Raby was a young lady with the usual allowance of feminine curiosity, which, though she was charity itself, did not like to be baulked by a mystery.

She therefore opened a letter she had just finished to her father, to add the following postscript:—

"Was this brave Captain Forrester who saved the guns a

friend of yours? Tell me all about him. Had he a wife and children? Surely something will be done for them, poor things."

Early next morning Mrs. Scarfe and her son left Wildtree.

Jeffreys, from Percy's window, watched them drive away.

"Very glad you must be to see the back of them," said Percy.

"I am glad," responded Jeffreys honestly.

"I'm not so frightfully sorry," said Percy. "Scarfe's a jolly enough chap, but he's up to too many dodges, don't you know? And he's dead on Raby, too. Quite as dead as you are, Jeff."

"Percy, a fortnight's congestion has not cured you of the bad habit of talking nonsense," said Jeffreys.

"All very well, you old humbug, but you know you are, aren't you?"

"Your cousin is very good and kind, and no one could help liking her. Everybody is 'dead on her,' as you call it, even Walker."

Percy enjoyed this, and allowed himself to be led off the dangerous topic. He was allowed to sit up for the first time this day, and held a small *levée* in his room.

Jeffreys took the opportunity to escape for a short time to the library, which he had scarcely been in since the day on the mountain.

He knew Mrs. Rimbolt would enjoy her visit to the sick chamber better without him, and he decidedly preferred his beloved books to her majestic society.

Percy, however, was by no means satisfied with the arrangement.

"Where's old Jeff?" said he presently, when his mother, Raby, and he were left alone. "Raby, go and tell Jeff, there's a brick. You can bet he's in the library. Tell him if he means to cut me dead, he might break it gently."

"Raby," said Mrs. Rimbolt, as her niece, with a smile, started on his majesty's errand, "I do not choose for you to go looking about for Mr. Jeffreys. There is a bell in the room,

and Walker can do it if required. It is unseemly in a young lady."

"One would think old Jeff was a wild beast or a nigger by the way you talk," said Percy complainingly. "All I know is, if it hadn't been for him, you'd all have been in deep mourning now, instead of having tea up here with me."

"It is quite possible, Percy,' said his mother, "for a person——"

"Person!" interrupted the boy. "Jeff's not a person; he's a gentleman. As good as any of us, only he hasn't got so much money."

"I fear, Percy, your illness has not improved your good manners. I wish to say that Mr. Jeffreys may have done you service——"

"I should think he has," interrupted the irrepressible one.

"But it by no means follows that he is a proper companion for a good innocent boy like you."

Percy laughed hilariously.

"Really, ma, you are coming it strong. Do you see my blushes, Raby?"

"You must make up your mind to see a great deal less of Mr. Jeffreys for the future; he is not the sort of person——"

"Look here, ma," said Percy, terrifying his parent by the energy with which he sprang to his feet. "I'm jolly ill, and you'd be awfully sorry if I had a fit of coughing and brought up blood, wouldn't you? Well, I shall if you call Jeff a person again. Where *is* Jeff, I say? I want Jeff. Why don't you tell him, Raby?"

After this, for a season at any rate, Percy was allowed to have his own way, and jeopardized his moral welfare by unrestricted intercourse with the "person" Jeffreys.

They spent their time not wholly unprofitably. For, besides a good deal of reading of history and classics (for which Percy was rapidly developing a considerable taste), and a good deal of discussion on all sorts of topics, they were deep in constructing the model of a new kind of bookcase, designed by Percy, with some ingenious contrivances for

keeping out dust and for marking, by means of automatic signals, the place of any book which should be taken from its shelf. This wonderful work of art promised to eclipse every bookcase ever invented. The only drawback to it was that it was too good. Percy insisted on introducing into it every "dodge" of which he was capable, and the poor model more than once threatened to collapse under the burden of its own ingenuity. However, they stuck to it, and by dint of sacrificing a "dodge" here and a "dodge" there, they succeeded in producing a highly curious and not unworthy model, which Percy was most urgent that his father should forthwith adopt for his library, all the existing bookcases being sacrificed for firewood to make way for the new ones.

Mr. Rimbolt diplomatically promised to give the matter his consideration, and consult authorities on the subject when next in London, and meanwhile was not unsparing in his compliments to the inventor and his coadjutor.

So the time passed happily enough for Jeffreys, until about three weeks after the Scarfes' departure, when the following amiable letter reached him with the Oxford postmark on the envelope :—

CHRIST CHURCH, *February 20th.*

"JEFFREYS,—You may have supposed that because I left Wildtree without showing you up in your proper character as a murderer and a hypocrite, that I have changed my opinions as to what is my duty to Mr. Rimbolt and his family in this matter. It is not necessary for me to explain to you why I did not do it at once, especially after the blackguardly manner in which you acted on the last evening of my stay there. You being Mr. Rimbolt's servant, I had to consider his convenience. I now write to say that you can spare me the unpleasant duty of informing the Wildtree household of what a miscreant they have in their midst by doing it yourself. If, after they know all, they choose to keep you on, there is nothing more to be said. You are welcome to the chance you will have of lying in order to whitewash yourself, but either I

or you must tell what we know. Meanwhile I envy you the feelings with which I dare say you read of the death of poor young Forrester's father in Afghanistan. How your cowardly crime must have brightened his last hours!

"Yours,

"E. SCARFE."

Jeffreys pitched this elegant specimen of polite Billingsgate contemptuously into the grate. He was not much a man of the world, but he could read through the lines of a poor performance like this.

Scarfe, for some reason or other, did not like to tell the Rimbolts himself, but he was most anxious they should know, and desired Jeffreys to do the dirty work himself. There was something almost amusing in the artlessness of the suggestion, and had the subject been less personally grievous, Jeffreys could have afforded to scoff at the whole business.

He sat down on the impulse of the moment and dashed off the following reply:—

"DEAR SCARFE,—Would it not be a pity that your sense of duty should not have the satisfaction of doing its own work, instead of begging me to do it for you? I may be all you say, but I am not mean enough to rob you of so priceless a jewel as the good conscience of a man who has done his duty. So I respectfully decline your invitation, and am,

"Yours,

"J. JEFFREYS."

Having relieved himself by writing it, he tore the note up, and tried to forget all about it.

But that was not quite so easy. Scarfe's part in the drama he could not forget, but the question faced him, not for the first time. Had he any right to be here, trusted, and by some of the family even respected? Was he not sailing under false colours, and pretending to be something he was not?

True, he had been originally engaged as a librarian, a post in which character was accounted of less importance than

scholarship and general proficiency. But he was more than a librarian now. Circumstances had made him the mentor and companion of a high-spirited, honest boy. Was it fair to Percy to keep a secret what would certainly shut the doors of Wildtree against him for ever? Was it fair to Mr. Rimbolt to accept this new responsibility without a word? Was it fair to Raby, who would shrink from him with detestation, did she know the whole story?

Scarfe would have been amply satisfied had he been present to note the disquietude which ensued for some days after the arrival of his letter. Jeffreys felt uncomfortable in his intercourse with Mr. Rimbolt; he avoided Raby, and even with Percy he was often unaccountably reserved and pensive.

"What are you in the blues about?" demanded that quick-sighted young gentleman on the first day out of doors after his illness. "Are you sorry I'm all serene again?"

"Rather," said Jeffreys; "it's not been a bad time."

"No more it has; but I must say I don't mind feeling my legs under me. I shall soon be ready for the top of Wild Pike again. But, I say, aren't you well? I expect you've been knocking yourself up over me?"

"Not a bit of it; I'm as well as anything."

Percy, however, was not satisfied. He had a vague idea that young gentlemen in love were as a rule sickly, and by a simple process of reasoning he guessed that Jeffreys and Raby "had had a row." He therefore took an early opportunity of mentioning the matter to his cousin, greatly to that young lady's confusion.

"Raby, I say, look here!" he began, a day or two afterwards, as he and his cousin were walking together. "What makes you so jolly down on Jeff?"

"I down on Mr. Jeffreys? What do you mean?"

"Well, he's so dismal, I'm certain he's eating his heart out about you! Why don't you back him up? He's a good enough chap and no end of a brick, and say what you will, he meant to fish you out that day on the ice. He went off like a shot directly after the ice cracked."

"Percy, you ridiculous boy!" said Raby, biting her lips; "how can you talk such nonsense?"

"Oh! but he did," persisted the boy.

"I'm not talking about the ice," said she. "Mr. Jeffreys and I are very good friends; chiefly on your account, too." added she, with a vague idea of qualifying her admission.

"Oh, ah, that won't wash, you know," said Percy. "Anyhow, it's nonsense you being so precious stiff with him; I'm sure he's as good as Scarfe."

"Percy, if you cannot talk sense," said Raby, nearly crying with vexation, "I shall not listen to you."

"Oh, all serene!" responded Percy. "Of course you're bound to make out it's all humbug, but I know better. Come, don't be in a rage, Raby; you forget I'm an invalid."

So they made it up on the spot, and Percy flattered himself he had done a great deal to make things right for Jeffreys.

Jeffreys, however, was still harassed by perplexity, and was gradually veering round to the conclusion that he must at all costs relieve his mind of his secret to Mr. Rimbolt. He put the task off day after day, shrinking from the wrench of all the ties which made his life happy.

One day, however, finding himself alone with Mr. Rimbolt in the library, he suddenly resolved then and there to speak out.

"Oh, Jeffreys," began Mr. Rimbolt, "I am very anxious to get those books from the Wanley Abbey sale looked through and catalogued within the next few days if you can manage it. We all go up to London, you know, next week, and I should be glad to have all square before we start."

"I have no doubt they can all be gone through before then."

"I should like you to come to town, too," said Mr. Rimbolt. "Percy sets great store by your companionship; besides which, there are some very important book sales coming on in which I shall want your help."

"I had been going to ask you——" began Jeffreys, feeling his temples throbbing like two steam-engines.

"Oh, by the way," interrupted Mr. Rimbolt, taking a letter

from his pocket, " did not you tell me you were at a school called Bolsover ? "

" Yes," faltered Jeffreys, wondering what was coming.

" It's very odd. I have a letter from an old Oxford acquaintance of mine, called Frampton, who appears to be head-master there, and whom I have never heard of for about sixteen years. He is fond of books, and writes to ask if he may come and see the library. I've asked him to stay a night, and expect him here to-morrow. I dare say you will be glad to meet him. Perhaps he knows you are here ? "

" No, I don't think so," said Jeffreys.

" Ah, then I dare say you will be glad to see one another again."

Jeffreys was considerably staggered by this unexpected announcement, but it relieved him of all present perplexity as to speaking to Mr. Rimbolt of young Forrester. He would at least wait till Mr. Frampton came, and put himself in his hands.

Mr. Frampton came, as young and fresh as ever. He was taking a three days' run in the Lake country during a term holiday, and, determined to do and see all he could, had decided to visit his old college friend, and look over the now famous Wildtree library.

His surprise at meeting Jeffreys was very considerable; and at first it seemed to the quondam pupil that his old master was shy of him. This, however, was explained as soon as they were alone, and had to do with the seven pounds, which had burned holes in Mr. Frampton's pockets ever since he received them, but which, not knowing Jeffreys' address, he had never been able to return.

" I was never more pained than when I received this money," said he. " Your guardian was written to by the clerk in ordinary course, but I never imagined the bill would be passed on to you."

Jeffreys had nothing for it but to take the money back, much as he disliked it. Until he did so, Mr. Frampton was too fidgety to be approachable on any other subject.

The morning after his arrival, they went up Wild Pike together—the first time Jeffreys had been on the mountain since the death of Julius. They had a fine day and no difficulty; but the long talk which beguiled the way amply made up to Jeffreys for the lack of adventure.

Mr. Frampton told him much about Bolsover, and of how it was at last beginning to thrive and recover from the dry-rot; how this winter the football team had got up a name for itself; how the school discussion society was crowded with members; how the cricket prospects were decidedly hopeful; and how two fellows had lately gained scholarships at Oxford. Then he began to ask Jeffreys about himself, and got from him a full account of all that had befallen him since he left school. Mr. Frampton was a most sympathetic listener, and the poor "dog with a bad name," who had almost forgotten the art of speaking his mind fully to any one, warmed insensibly to this friend as they talked, and reproached himself for the pride and shortsightedness which had induced him to shut himself out so long from his friendship.

Then they talked of young Forrester. Mr. Frampton made no attempt to gloss over the wickedness of that unhappy act of passion. But he showed how fully he made allowances for the poor blundering offender, and how he, at least, saw more to pity than to upbraid in it all.

He knew nothing of young Forrester's fate. He had seen in the papers the notice of Captain Forrester's death, from whom, months before, he had had a letter of inquiry as to his son's whereabouts, and to whom he had written telling all he knew, which was but little.

Then Jeffreys unfolded his present uncomfortable dilemma, and his intention of speaking to Mr. Rimbolt, and they talked it over very seriously and anxiously. At last Mr. Frampton said,—

"Let me speak to Mr. Rimbolt."

"Most thankfully I will."

So Mr. Frampton spoke to Mr. Rimbolt, and told him frankly all there was to tell, and Mr. Rimbolt, like a

gentleman who knew something of Christian charity, joined his informant in pitying the offender.

"Jeffreys," said he, the day after Mr. Frampton's departure, "your friend has told me a story about you which I heard with great sorrow. You are now doing all that an honest man can do, with God's help, to make up for what is past. What I have been told does not shake my present confidence in you in any way, and I need not tell you that not a single person in this house beyond yourself and me shall know anything about this unhappy affair."

CHAPTER XXI

"Going It"

JEFFREYS started for London with a lighter heart than he had known since he first came to Wildtree. When he contrasted his present sense of relief with the oppression which had preceded it, he marvelled how he could ever have gone on so long, dishonestly nursing his wretched secret under Mr. Rimbolt's roof. Now, in the first reaction of relief, he was tempted to believe his good name was really come back, and that Mr. Rimbolt having condoned his offence, the memory of Bolsover was cancelled.

It was a passing temptation only. Alas! that memory clung still. Nothing could alter the past; and though he might now feel secure from its consequences, he had only to think of young Forrester to remind him that somewhere the black mark stood against his name as cruelly as ever.

Yet, comparatively, he felt light-hearted, as with the Rimbolt family he stood at last on the London platform.

It was new ground to him. Some years ago Mr. Halgrove had lived several months in the Metropolis, and the boy, spending his summer holidays there, and left entirely to his own devices, had learned in a plodding way about as much of the great city as a youth of seventeen could well do in the time.

The Rimbolts' house in Clarges Street was to Jeffreys' mind not nearly so cheerful as Wildtree. The library in it

consisted of a small collection of books, chiefly political, for Mr. Rimbolt's use in his parliamentary work; and the dark little room allotted to him, with its look-out on the mews, was dull indeed compared with the chamber at Wildtree, from which he could at least see the mountain.

Nor did he by any means enjoy the constant round of entertainments which went on in London, at which he was sometimes called upon in a humble way to assist. He had been obliged, in deference to Mrs. Rimbolt's broad hints, to buy a dress suit, and in this he was expected on occasions to present himself at the end of a grand dinner-party, or when Mr. Rimbolt required his professional attendance.

For, there being no books to take care of here, Mr. Rimbolt availed himself of his librarian's services as a private secretary in some important political business, and found him so efficient and willing, that he proposed to him a considerable increase in his salary, in consideration of his permanently undertaking a good share of his employer's ordinary correspondence.

The chief portion of Jeffreys' time, however, still belonged to Percy, and it was a decided relief to him that that young gentleman scoffed at and eschewed the endless hospitalities and entertainments with which his mother delighted to fill up their life in London.

"I don't see the fun of gorging night after night, do you, Jeff? A good spread's all very well now and again, but you get sick of it seven nights a week. Makes me sleepy. Then all these shows and things! I've a good mind to get laid up again, and have a real good time. There's to be no end of a crowd here to-night—everybody. I shall cut it if I can; shan't you?"

"Mr. Rimbolt wants me to come into the drawing-room after dinner," said Jeffreys.

"All serene! That won't be till nine. Come up to Putney, and have a row on the river this afternoon."

Percy was an enthusiastic oarsman, and many an afternoon Jeffreys and he, flying from the crowd, had spent on the grand

old Thames. Jeffreys enjoyed it as much as he, and no one, seeing the boy and his tutor together in their pair-oar, would have imagined that the broader of the two was that ungainly lout who had once been an object of derision in the Bolsover meadows.

The party that evening was, as Percy predicted, a very large one, and Jeffreys had the discomfort of recognizing a few of the guests who last autumn had helped to make his position so painful.

They, to do them justice, did not now add to his discomfort by recognizing him. Even the lady who had given him that half-crown appeared wholly to have forgotten the object of her charity.

What, however, made him most uncomfortable was the sight of Mrs. Scarfe, and hearing her say to Percy, "Edward is coming on Saturday, Percy; he is looking forward with such pleasure to taking you about to see the University sports and the Roat Race. Your dear mamma has kindly asked two of his college friends to come too, so you will be quite a merry quartette."

Jeffreys had nearly forgotten Scarfe's existence of late. He no longer dreaded him on his own account, but on Percy's he looked forward to Saturday with dismay. He would have liked to know also, as a mere matter of curiosity of course, what Raby thought about the promised visit.

His own communications with that young lady had not been very frequent of late, although they continued friendly. Percy's nonsense gave them both a considerable amount of embarrassment; for although Jeffreys never for a moment supposed that Mr. Rimbolt's niece thought twice about him except as a persecuted dependant and a friend to Percy, to have anything else suggested disturbed his shy nature, and made him feel constrained in her presence.

"You'll have to mind your eye with Raby now that Scarfe's coming," said Percy that night. "You bet he'll try to hook her. I heard his mother flying kites with ma about it, to see how the land lies."

Jeffreys had given up the formality of pretending, when Percy launched out on this delicate subject, not to know what he was talking about.

"Whatever Scarfe does," said he, "is nothing to me."

"What! don't you and Raby hit it off, then?"

"Hit what off?"

"I mean aren't you dead on her, don't you know?—spoons, and all that sort of thing?"

"I am not aware that I entertain feelings towards anybody which could be described by any article of cutlery at all."

"Well, all I can say is, when I blowed her up for being down on you, she blushed up no end, and cried too. I should like to know what you call that, if it isn't spoons?"

"I think it would be kinder, Percy, if you did not talk to your cousin about me; and I fancy she would as soon you did not talk about her to me."

"Well, that's rather what I should call a shut-up," said Percy. "It bothers me how people that like one another get so precious shy of letting the other fellow know it. I know I shan't. I'll have it out at once, before any other chap comes and cuts me out."

With which valiant determination Percy earned Jeffreys' gratitude by relapsing into silence.

He was, however, destined to have the uncomfortable topic revived in another and more unexpected quarter.

On the day before Scarfe's proposed visit, Walker accosted him as he was going out, with the announcement that my lady would like to speak to him in the morning-room.

This rare summons never failed to wring a groan from the depths of the librarian's spirit, and it did now as he proceeded to the torture-chamber.

The lady was alone, and evidently burdened with the importance of the occasion.

"Mr. Jeffreys," said she, with a tone of half conciliation which put up Jeffreys' back far more than her usual severe drawl, "kindly take a seat; I wish to speak to you."

"It's all up with me!" groaned the unhappy Jeffreys inwardly, as he obeyed.

Mrs. Rimbolt gathered herself together, and began.

"I desire to speak to you, Mr. Jeffreys, in reference to my niece, Miss Atherton, who, in her father's absence, is here under my protection and parental control."

Jeffreys flushed up ominously.

"It does not please me, Mr. Jeffreys, to find you, occupying, as you do, the position of a dependant in this house, so far forgetting yourself as to consider that there is anything in your respective positions which justifies you in having communications with Miss Atherton other than those of a respectful stranger."

Jeffreys found himself frivolously thinking this elaborate sentence would be an interesting exercise in parsing for the head class at Galloway House. He barely took in that the remarks were intended for him at all, and his abstracted look apparently disconcerted Mrs. Rimbolt.

"I must request your attention, Mr. Jeffreys," said she severely.

"I beg your pardon. I am all attention."

"I am quite willing to suppose," continued she, "that it is ignorance on your part rather than intentional misconduct which has led you into this; but from henceforth I wish it to be clearly undertood that I shall expect you to remember your proper station in this house. Miss Atherton, let me tell you, has no need of your attentions. You perfectly understand me, Mr. Jeffreys?"

Jeffreys bowed, still rather abstractedly.

"You do not reply to my question, Mr. Jeffreys."

"I perfectly understand you, madam."

"I trust I shall not have to speak to you again."

"I trust not," said Jeffreys, with a fervour which startled the lady.

He left the room, outraged, insulted, sorely tempted to shake the dust of the place once and for all from off his feet. The evil temper within him once more asserted itself as he

flung himself into his room, slamming the door behind him with a force that made the whole house vibrate.

The narrow room was insupportable. It stifled him. He must get out into the fresh air or choke.

On the doorstep he met Mr. Rimbolt, alighting from his brougham.

"Oh, Jeffreys, so glad to have caught you. Look here. I find I must be in the House to-night and to-morrow, and I intended to go down to Exeter to attend that four days' sale of Lord Waterfield's library. I must get you to go for me. You have the catalogue we went through together, with the lots marked which I must have. I have put an outside price against some, and the others must be mine at any price—you understand. Stick at nothing. Take plenty of money with you for travelling and expenses. Do things comfortably, and I will give you a blank cheque for the books. Mind I must have them, if it comes to four figures. Go down by the Flying Dutchman to-night, and send me a telegram at the end of each day to say what you have secured."

The proposal came opportunely to Jeffreys. He was in the humour of accepting anything for a change; and this *carte blanche* proposal, and the responsibility it involved, contained a spice of excitement which suited with his present mood.

He went down to Exeter that night, trying to think of nothing but Lord Waterfield's books, and to forget all about Raby, and Percy, and Mrs. Rimbolt, and Scarfe.

The last-named hero and his two friends duly presented themselves at Clarges Street next day. Scarfe was in great good-humour with himself, and even his antipathies to the world at large were decidedly modified by the discovery that Jeffreys was out of town.

His two friends were of the gay and festive order—youths who would have liked to be considered fast, but betrayed constantly that they did not yet know the way how.

Percy, with his usual facile disposition, quickly fell into the ways of the trio, and rather enjoyed the luxury of now

and then getting a rise out of the undergrads by showing that "he knew a thing or two" himself.

They spent their first few days together in "going it"—that is, in seeing and doing all they could. Scarfe's friends began shyly, feeling their way both with their host and hostess and with their son. But then they saw that Mr. Rimbolt was far too engrossed to think of anything beyond that they should all enjoy themselves and do as they liked—when they saw that Mrs. Rimbolt swore by Scarfe, and, to use the choice language of one of them, "didn't sit up at anything as long as the Necktie was in it"—and when they saw that Percy was a cool hand, and, whatever he thought, did not let himself be startled by anything, these two ingenuous youths plucked up heart and "let out all round."

They haunted billiard saloons, but failed to delude any one into the belief that they knew one end of a cue from another. They went to theatres, where the last thing they looked at was the stage. They played cards without being quite sure what was the name of the game they played. They smoked cigars, which it was well for their juvenile stomachs were "warranted extra mild"; and they drank wine which neither made glad their hearts nor improved their digestions; and they spiced their conversation with big words which they did not know the meaning of themselves, and would certainly have never found explained in the dictionary.

Percy, after a few days, got sick of it. He had never "gone it" in this style before; and finding out what it meant, he didn't see much fun in it. Late hours and unwholesome food and never-ending "sport" did not agree with him. He had looked forward to seeing a lot of the boat practice on the river, and hearing a lot about University sport and life. But in this he was disappointed. The "boats" were voted a nuisance; and whenever the talk turned on Oxford it was instantly tabooed as "shop." Scarfe sneered to him in private about these two fools, but when with them he "went it" with the rest, and made no protest.

"Percy," said Raby, two or three days after this sort of

thing had been going on, "you look wretchedly pale and tired. Why do you stay out so late every night?"

"Oh," said Percy wearily, "I don't know—we humbug about. Nothing very bad."

"If it makes you ill and wretched, I say it is bad, Percy," said the girl.

"Oh, I don't know. Scarfe goes in for it, you know."

"I don't care a bit who goes in for it. It's bad."

"You don't mean to say you think Scarfe is a bad lot?"

"Don't speak to me of Mr. Scarfe. I hate him for this!"

Percy whistled.

"Hullo, I say! here's a go!" he cried. "Then you're really spoons on Jeff after all? How awfully glad he'll be when I tell him!"

"Percy I shall hate *you* if you talk like that!" said the girl. "I hate any one who is not good to you; and it is certainly not good to you to lead you into folly and perhaps wickedness."

This protest had its effect on Percy. The next day he struck, and pleaded an excuse for accompanying the precious trio on an expedition to Windsor, to be consummated by a champagne supper at the "Christopher."

They urged him hard, and tempted him sorely by the prospect of a row on the river and any amount of fun. He declined stubbornly. He was fagged, and not in the humour. Awfully sorry to back out and all that, but he couldn't help it, and wanted to save up for the Sports and Boat Race on Friday and Saturday.

They gave him up as a bad job, and started without him.

He watched them go without much regret, and then, putting on his hat, walked off towards Paddington to meet Jeffreys, who was due in about an hour.

The quiet walk through the streets rather revived him; and the prospect of seeing Jeffreys again was still more refreshing.

Of course he knew he should have to tell him of his folly, and Jeff would "sit on him" in his solemn style. Still, that was better than getting his head split open with cigars, and having to laugh at a lot of trashy jokes.

Jeffreys was delighted to see him; and the two were leaving Paddington arm-in-arm when Scarfe and his two friends, alighting from a cab, suddenly confronted them.

CHAPTER XXII

The Bad Name

PERCY was riotously greeted by Scarfe's two friends.

" Hullo, old man ! " cried one of them ; " then you thought better of it, after all, and mean to join us ! That's the style ! "

" Bring your handsome friend with you. More the merrier. There'll be cham. enough for the lot."

" Look alive," said Percy ; " you'll lose your train. Jeff and I aren't coming."

" Why not ? " said they.

" Because we're going the other way," replied Percy, who, when his mind was made up, did not appreciate anybody's importunity. " I've not seen Jeff for a week."

" Who is this precious Jeff ? " said one of Scarfe's friends, pointing over his shoulder to the librarian.

" He's a gentleman employed by the month to look after Percy's morals," said Scarfe, with a sneer.

" A parson ! What a game ! No wonder Percy draws in his horns a bit when he comes home. Anyhow, we must save him from the paws of the lion if we can. I say, Percy, you must come, old man. We made all the arrangements for four, boat and everything ; and if you don't want to stay late we'll give up the supper. Only don't spoil our day, there's a good fellow. You'll be able to see lots of your friend when we've gone."

" You be hanged," observed Percy, now in an uncom-

plimentary mood; "haven't I told you I'm not coming? What more do you want?"

"Oh, of course, if you're so taken up with this reverend thing of beauty," said one of them sulkily, "we're out of it. I should have thought he could have snuffled to himself for a day without wanting you to help him."

Scarfe all this time stood by in a rage. The sight of Jeffreys was to him like the dead fly in the apothecary's ointment. It upset him and irritated him with everybody and everything. He had guessed, on receiving no reply to his recent polite letter, that he had exposed his own poor hand to his enemy, and he hated him accordingly with a double hatred.

He contrived, however, to keep up an appearance of scornful indifference.

"You are still reaping the rewards of virtue, pious homicide," he sneered.

"I still envy the upright man who does his duty," replied Jeffreys, scarcely less bitterly.

"What do you mean, you——"

"I mean what I say," said Jeffreys, turning on his heel, and taking Percy's arm.

They walked home, and before Clarges Street was reached Percy had told his friend an unvarnished story of the follies of the last few days, and enlisted his support in his determination to pull up.

There was something touching in the mingled shame and anger of the proud boy as he made his confession, not sparing himself, and full of scorn at those who had tempted him. Jeffreys was full of righteous wrath on his behalf, and ran up a score against Scarfe which would have astonished that worthy, listlessly loafing about at Windsor, had he guessed it.

"I've promised to go and see the Boat Race with them," said Percy; "but you must come too. I know you'll hate it, and so will they; but somehow I can't do without a little backing up."

"I'll back you up, old fellow, all I can. I only wish," added

he, for the boy's confidence in him humiliated him, "I had a better right to do it."

"Why, Jeff, I don't suppose you ever did a bad thing in your life."

"Don't say that," said Jeffreys almost appealingly, "I have!"

The boy looked up at him, startled for a moment by his tone. Then he said, with a return of his old look of confidence—

"Poor old Jeff! That's what makes you so blue sometimes. If it weren't for you, I'd have a precious good right to be in the blues too."

Jeffreys, who had not entered the house since his interview with Mrs. Rimbolt, felt anything but comfortable as he again set foot within it; and had it not been for Percy's countenance, he would have felt it still more of an ordeal.

He had, however, plenty to occupy his mind during the hour or two which followed. Mr. Rimbolt was waiting for him eagerly, to hear all about the sale and the purchases which had been made.

"You've done a capital stroke of business for me, Jeffreys," said he, when the report had been concluded. "Those three Caxtons I would not have missed for anything. I am quite glad that business will take me North next week, as I shall be able to run over to Wildtree and see some of the treasures unpacked. I shall, however, leave them for you finally to arrange when we all go back in June. You've seen Percy? I fancy he has been racketing rather too much with these friends of his; but I imagine Scarfe would see he went into no mischief. However, I am glad you have come back, for the boy's sake, as you understand him. This summer I think you should take him a little run in Normandy or Switzerland. It would do him good, and you, too, to knock about abroad for a week or two. However, there's time enough to talk about that. And I dare say you will be glad now to get a little rest after your journey."

Jeffreys returned to his room very contentedly. The

confidence Mr. Rimbolt reposed in him was soothing to his spirits, and went far to obliterate the memory of that hideous interview last week.

Percy was out when, after washing and changing his travelling garb, he came down to the morning-room, which he usually occupied during the afternoon.

To his surprise, and even consternation, Raby was there, writing.

She rose, brightly, almost radiantly, as he entered.

"Oh, Mr. Jeffreys, how glad I am to see you back! Poor Percy has been in such want of you! These Oxford friends of his, I am certain, have not been doing him any good. Have you seen him? I am so happy you have come back!"

Jeffreys was not made of adamant, and a greeting like this, even though it was offered on some one else's behalf, was enough to drive Mrs. Rimbolt completely out of his head.

"I am very fortunate to be able to make you happy so easily," said he. "Yes, I have seen Percy, and heard all his troubles. How could any one help being grateful for a confidence like his? You know, Miss Atherton, I would do anything for him."

"I believe you," said she warmly. "You are good and unselfish."

"Do you mind my saying," said Jeffreys, colouring, "that it is an additional pleasure to do what I can for Percy if it makes you happy?"

"I don't mind your saying it if it is true. It does make me happy."

And her face was the best witness to her sincerity.

Jeffreys was not the only person who saw that bright smile. Mrs. Rimbolt, entering the room at that moment, saw it too, and heard the words which it accompanied.

She glared round witheringly on Jeffreys.

"So, Mr. Jeffreys, *you* are here. What brings you here?"

"Mr. Jeffreys——" began Raby, feeling and looking very confused.

"Silence, Raby, I asked Mr. Jeffreys."

"I came here not knowing the room was occupied. It was a pleasant surprise to find Miss Atherton here, and she has been making me happy by talking to me about Percy."

"Mr. Jeffreys," said the lady, "allow me to say I do not believe you."

"Auntie!" exclaimed Raby, firing up in a manner unusual to her "it is true. Mr. Jeffreys always tells the truth!"

"Raby, my dear, you had better leave the room."

"No, auntie!" exclaimed the girl. "You have no right to charge Mr. Jeffreys with saying what is not true. It's not fair—it's wrong—it's wicked!"

"You forget, my dear, of all persons you should not address me like this."

"No," said the girl, going to the door, which Jeffreys opened for her. "I don't forget, and I shall not forget. You have no right to say it. I wish father was home again, and would take me away!"

In the midst of his own indignation, Jeffreys could not help admiring this outbreak of righteous indignation on the part of the spirited girl.

Mrs. Rimbolt little guessed how much she herself was doing to defeat her own ends.

"Mr. Jeffreys," said she, after Raby had gone, "after our interview last week, your conduct is both disgraceful and dishonourable. I should not have believed it even of you."

"Pardon me, madam. You have charged me with telling you a lie just now. Is that so?"

His tone was strangely peremptory. Mrs. Rimbolt had never seen him like this before—and for the moment it disconcerted her.

"What I heard as I entered the room had no reference to Percy," said she.

"Excuse me—it had. Miss Atherton——"

"If it had, I must believe you. I wish to hear no more about it. But after your promise last week——"

"I made no promise, and should decline to do so. I am quite aware of my position here, and am ready to give it up when called upon. But while I stay here and do my work, Mrs. Rimbolt, I claim to be protected from insult."

"It is useless to prolong this interview, Mr. Jeffreys," said Mrs. Rimbolt, half-scared by the turn things had taken. "I never expected to be addressed in this way in my own house by one who is dependent on my husband for his living. You can leave me, sir."

Jeffreys bowed, and retired to his room, where he awaited as calmly as he could what appeared to him the inevitable end of the scene—a notice to quit.

But it did not come. Mrs. Rimbolt knew herself to be in the wrong. Her husband, she knew, if she laid the case before him, would judicially inquire into its merits, and come to the same conclusion. In that case her dominion would be at an end. Even the Mrs. Rimbolts have an eye to the better half of valour sometimes, and so Jeffreys was left sitting for an ultimatum which did not come.

Raby had a still worse ordeal before her. At first her indignation had reigned supreme and effaced all other emotions. Gradually, however, a feeling of vague misery ensued. She longed to be away in India with her dear soldier father; she wished Jeffreys had never come under the Wildtree roof to bring insult on himself and wretchedness to her. She dreaded the future for her boy cousin without his protector, and half wished him dead and safe from temptation.

In due time her brave spirit came back. She despised herself for her weakness, and, resolved boldly to face her aunt and every one, she came down to dinner.

It was strictly a family party, with Mrs. Scarfe added; for the other three visitors had not yet returned from Windsor. Raby sought protection from her aunt by devoting herself to Mrs. Scarfe, and quite delighted that good lady by her brightness and spirit. Mrs. Scarfe took occasion in the drawing-room afterwards to go into rhapsodies to her young friend regarding her son; and when about ten o'clock the holiday-

makers arrived home, in high spirits and full of their day's sport, she achieved a grand stroke of generalship by leaving the two young people together in the conservatory, having previously, by a significant pressure of her son's arm, given him to understand that now was his time for striking while the iron was hot.

Scarfe was in an unusually gay mood, and still a little elevated by the festivities of the day.

"I'm sure you missed us," said he, "didn't you?"

"The house was certainly much quieter," said Raby.

"Do you know," said he, "it's rather pleasant to feel that one is missed?"

Raby said nothing, but began to feel a desire to be safely back in the drawing-room.

"Do you know we drank toasts to-day, like the old knights, to our lady loves?" continued Scarfe.

"Indeed," replied Raby, as unconcernedly as she could.

"Yes—and shall I tell you the name I pledged? Ah, I see you know, Raby."

"Mr. Scarfe, I want to go back to the drawing-room; please take me."

Scarfe took her hand. His head was swimming, partly with excitement, partly with the effects of the supper.

"Not till I tell you I love you, and——"

"Mr. Scarfe, I don't want to hear all this," said Raby, snatching her hand away angrily, and moving to the door.

He seized it again rudely.

"You mean you don't care for me?" asked he.

"I want to go away," said she.

"Tell me first," said he, detaining her; "do you mean you will not have me—that you don't love me?"

"I don't," said she.

"Then," said he, sober enough now, and standing between her and the door, "there is another question still Is the reason because some one else in this house has——"

"Mr. Scarfe," said Raby quietly, "don't you think, when

I ask you to let me go, it is not quite polite of you to prevent me ?"

"Please excuse me," he said apologetically. "I was excited, and forgot; but, Raby, do let me warn you, for your sake, to beware of this fellow Jeffreys. No, let me speak," said he, as she put up her hand to stop him. "I will say nothing to offend you. You say you do not care for me, and I have nothing to gain by telling you this. If he has——"

"Mr. Scarfe, you are quite mistaken; do, please, let me go."

Scarfe yielded, bitterly mortified and perplexed. His vanity had all along only supposed one possible obstacle to his success with Raby, and that was a rival. That she would decline to have him for any other reason had been quite beyond his calculations, and he would not believe it now. Jeffreys may not have actually gone as far as to propose to her, but, so it seemed, there was some understanding between them which barred Scarfe's own chance. The worst of it all was that to do the one thing he would have liked to do would be to spoil his own chance altogether. For Raby, whether she cared for Jeffreys or not, would have nothing to say to Scarfe if he was the means of his ruin.

The air during the next few days seemed charged with thunder. Mrs. Rimbolt was in a state of war with every one, Mrs. Scarfe was poorly, the two Oxford visitors began to vote their visit slow, Scarfe was moody, Raby was unhappy, Jeffreys felt continually half-choked, Percy alone kept up his spirits, while Mr. Rimbolt, happiest of all, went up North to look at his old books.

No one was particularly sorry when the visits came to an end. Even the Sports and Boat Race had failed to revive the drooping spirits of the Oxonians, and on the Monday following it was with a considerable stretch of politeness that they all thanked Mrs. Rimbolt for a very pleasant visit.

Scarfe, taking farewell of Raby, begged that some time, later on, he might come to see her again, but was quite unable to

gather from her reply whether she desired it or not. Jeffreys wisely kept out of the way while the departures were taking place, despite Mrs. Rimbolt's suggestion that he should be sent for to help the cabman carry out the boxes.

The first evening after they were all gone the house seemed another place. Even Jeffreys felt he could breathe, despite Mr. Rimbolt's absence, and the hostile proximity of his lady.

As to Raby and Percy, they made no concealment of the relief they felt, and went off for a row on the river to celebrate the occasion.

Jeffreys judiciously excused himself from accompanying them, and went a long walk by himself.

Two days later, after lunch, just as Percy and Raby had departed for a ride in the park, and Jeffreys had shut himself up in Mr. Rimbolt's study to write, a letter was delivered by the post addressed to Mrs. Rimbolt, bearing the Oxford post-mark. It was from Scarfe, and Mrs. Rimbolt opened her eyes as she perused it:—

CHRISTCHURCH, *April 2.*

"DEAR MRS. RIMBOLT,—I reached here from home this morning, and hasten to send you a line to thank you for the very pleasant visit I spent in London last week. I should have written sooner, but that I was anxious to write you on another and less pleasant subject, which I felt should not be done hurriedly. You will, I dare say, blame me for not having told you earlier what I now feel it my duty to tell, and I trust you will understand the feelings which have prevented my doing so. John Jeffreys, who is in Mr. Rimbolt's employment, is, as you know, an old schoolfellow of mine. I was surprised to see him at Wildtree last Christmas, and took the trouble to inquire whether he had come to you with a character, or whether you had any knowledge of his antecedents. I imagined you had not, and supposed that, as he was only engaged as a librarian, inquiries as to his character were not considered necessary. But when I saw that he was being admitted as a member of your household, and specially allowed

to exercise an influence on Percy, I assure you I felt uncomfortable, and it has been on my mind ever since to tell you what I feel you ought to know. Jeffreys ran away from school after committing a cruel act which, to all intents and purposes, was murder. His victim was a small boy whom we all loved, and who never did him harm. The details of the whole affair are too horrible to dwell upon here, but I have said enough to show you what sort of person it is who is at present entrusted with the care of your own son, and allowed to associate on a footing of equality with your niece, Miss Atherton. I can assure you it is very painful to me to write this, for I know how it will shock you. But I feel my conscience would not give me peace till I told you all. May I now ask one special favour from you? It is well known, and you probably have noticed it yourself, that Jeffreys and I naturally dislike one another. But I want you to believe that I write this, not because I dislike Jeffreys, but because I like you all, and feel that Percy particularly is in peril. What I ask is that if you think it right to take any action in the matter, my name may not be mentioned. It would be considered an act of spite on my part, which it is not; and perhaps I may mention to you that I have special reasons for wishing that Miss Atherton, at least, should not think worse of me than I deserve. She would certainly misunderstand it if my name were mentioned. I feel I have only done my duty, and I assure you it will be a great relief to me to know that you are rid of one who cannot fail to exercise a fatal influence on the pure and honest mind of my friend Percy.

"Believe me, dear Mrs. Rimbolt, most sincerely yours,

"E. SCARFE."

The shock which this astounding communication gave to Mrs. Rimbolt can be more easily imagined than described. It explained everything—her instinctive dislike of the man from the first, his moroseness and insolence, and the cunning with which he had insinuated himself first into her husband's and then into Percy's confidence! How blind she had been

not to see it all before! She might have known that he was a villain! Now, however, her duty was clear, and she would be wicked if she delayed to act upon it a moment. If Mr. Rimbolt had been at home, it would have fallen on him to discharge it, but he was not, and she must do it for him.

Whereupon this worthy matron girded herself for the fray, and stalked off to the study.

Jeffreys was busy transcribing some bibliographical notes which he had brought away with him from Exeter. The work was not very engrossing, and he had leisure now and then to let his mind wander, and the direction his thoughts took was towards Mr. Rimbolt's little plan of a run on the Continent for Percy and himself this summer. Jeffreys had been afraid to acknowledge to himself how much the plan delighted him. He longed to see the everlasting snows, and the lakes, and the grand old mediæval cities, and the prospect of seeing them with Percy, away from all that could annoy or jar—

He had got so far when the door opened, and Mrs. Rimbolt stood before him.

The lady was pale, and evidently agitated beyond her wont. She stood for a moment facing Jeffreys, and apparently waiting for words. The librarian's back went up in anticipation. If it was more about Raby, he would leave the room before he forgot himself.

"Mr. Jeffreys," said the lady, and her words came slowly and hoarsely, "I request you to leave this house in half an hour."

It was Jeffreys' turn to start and grow pale.

"May I ask why?" he said.

"You know why, sir," said the lady. "You have known why ever since you had the meanness to enter Wildtree on false pretences."

"Really, Mrs. Rimbolt," began Jeffreys, with a cold shudder passing through him, "I am at a loss——"

"Don't speak to me, sir! You knew you had no right to enter the house of honest, respectable people—you knew you

had no right to take advantage of an accident to insinuate yourself into this family, and impose upon the unsuspecting good-nature of my husband. No one asked you for your character; for no one imagined you could be quite so hypocritical as you have been. You, the self-constituted friend and protector of my precious boy—you, with the stain of blood on your hands and the mark of Cain on your forehead! Leave my house at once; I desire no words. You talked grandly about claiming to be protected from insult in this house. It is we who claim to be protected from a hypocrite and a murderer! Begone; and consider yourself fortunate that instead of walking out a free man, you are not taken out to the punishment you deserve!"

When Jeffreys, stunned and stupefied, looked up, the room was empty.

Mechanically he finished a sentence he had been writing, then letting the pen drop from his hand, sat where he was, numbed body and soul. Mrs. Rimbolt's words dinned in his ears, and with them came those old haunting sounds, the yells on the Bolsover meadows, the midnight shriek of the terrified boy, the cold sneer of his guardian, the brutal laugh of Jonah Trimble. All came back in one confused hideous chorus, yelling to him that his bad name was alive still, dogging him down, down, mocking his foolish dreams of deliverance and hope, hounding him out into the night to hide his head indeed, but never to hide himself from himself.

How long he sat there he knew not. When he rose he was at least calm and resolved.

He went up to his own room and looked through his little stock of possessions. The old suit in which he had come to Wildtree was there; and an impulse seized him to put it on in exchange for the trim garments he was wearing. Of his other goods and chattels he took a few special favourites. His Homer—Julius's collar—a cricket cap—a pocket compass which Percy had given him, and an envelope which Raby had once directed to him for her uncle. His money—his last quarter's salary—he took too, and his old stick which he had

cut in the lanes near Ash Cottage. That was all. Then quietly descending the deserted stairs, and looking neither to the right hand nor the left, he crossed the hall and opened the front door.

A pang shot through him as he did so. Was he never to see Percy again, or *her*? What would they think of him?

The thought maddened him; and as he stood in the street he seemed to hear their voices, too, in the awful clamour, and rushed blindly forth, anywhere, to escape it.

CHAPTER XXIII

A Plunge Downward

A CHILL October squall was whistling through the trees in Regent's Park, stirring up the fallen leaves on the footpaths, and making the nursemaids, as they listlessly trundled their perambulators, shiver suddenly, and think of the nursery fire and the singing kettle on the hob. The gathering clouds above sent the park-keeper off to his shed for a waterproof, and emptied the carriage-drive of the vehicles in which a few semi-grand people were taking an afternoon airing at half a crown an hour. A little knot of small boys, intently playing football, with piled-up jackets for goals, and on old parti-coloured " bouncer " for a ball, were the last to take alarm at the lowering sky; nor was it till the big drops fell in their midst that they scattered right and left, and left the park empty.

No; not quite empty. One young man sat on through the rain on the seat from which he had been watching the boys' game. A shabby, almost ragged young man, with a disagreeable face and an almost contemptuous curl of the lips, as the rain, gathering force every second, buffeted him in the face and drenched him where he sat. There were a hundred seats more sheltered than that on which he sat; and by walking scarcely fifty yards he could have escaped the rain altogether. But he sat recklessly on, and let the rain do its worst, his eyes still on the empty football field, and his ears ringing still with the merry shouts of the departed boys.

My reader, had he chanced to pass down that deserted walk on this stormy afternoon, would hardly have recognized in the lonely occupant of that seat the John Jeffreys he had seen six months ago at Clarges Street. It was not merely that he looked haggard and ill, or that his clothes were ragged. That was bad enough, but the reader has seen him in such a plight before. But what he has not seen before—or if at all, only in passing moments—is the bitter, hard look on his face, changing it miserably. A stranger passing him that afternoon would have said—

"There sits a man who hates all the world."

We, who know him better, would have said—

"There sits our poor dog with a bad name, deserted even by hope."

And so it was.

Jeffreys had left Clarges Street smarting under a sense of injury, but still resolved to keep up the fight for his good name, in which for so many months past he had been engaged.

Not by appealing to Mr. Rimbolt. Although he knew, had Mr. Rimbolt been at home, all this would not have happened, his pride forbade him now to take a single step to reinstate himself in a house from which he had been so ignominiously expelled. No, not even when that house held within its walls Percy and Raby. The idea of going back filled him with horror.

On the contrary, he would hide himself from them, even though they sought to find him; and not till his name was as good as theirs would he see them again or come near them.

Which surely was another way of resolving never to see them again; for the leopard cannot change his spots or the Ethiopian his skin! A bad name is a stain which no washing can efface; it clings wherever you go, and often men who see it see nothing else in you but the scar.

So thought poor Jeffreys as he slowly turned his back on all that was dear to him in life, and went out into the night of the unsympathetic city.

At first, as I said, he tried to hold up his head. He

inquired in one or two quarters for work. But the question always came up—

"What is your character?"

"I have none," he would say doggedly.

"Why did you leave your last place?"

"I was turned away."

"What for?"

"Because I am supposed to have killed a boy once."

Once indeed he did get a temporary job at a warehouse—as a porter—and for a week, a happy week, used his broad back and brawny arms in carrying heavy loads and lifting weights. Hope sprang again within him as he laboured. He might yet, by beginning at the lowest step, rise above his evil name and conquer it.

Alas! One day a shilling was lost from the warehouseman's desk. Jeffreys had been seen near the place and was suspected. He resented the charge scornfully at first, then savagely, and in an outbreak of rage struck his accuser. He was impeached before the head of the firm, and it was discovered that he had come without a character. That was enough. He was bundled out of the place at five minutes' notice, with a threat of a policeman if he made it six. And even when a week later the shilling was found in the warehouseman's blotting-paper, no one doubted that the cashiered rogue was as cunning as he was nefarious.

After that he had given up what seemed the farce of holding up his head. What was the use, he said, when, as sure as night follows day, that bad name of his dogged him wherever he went?

So Jeffreys began to go down. In after years he spoke very little of those six months in London, and when he did it was about people he had met, and not about himself. What he did, where he lodged, how he lived, these were matters he never mentioned and never liked to be asked about.

I am quite sure myself that the reason of this silence was not shame. He was not one of those fellows who revenge

themselves on fate by deliberately going to the bad. At his worst, he had no taste for vice or any affinity for it. He may have sunk low, not because he himself was low, but because in his miserable feud with all the world he scorned not to share the lot of others as miserable as himself.

His money—he had a few pounds when he left Clarges Street—soon failed him. He made no great effort to keep it, and was relieved to see the end of it. His companions in misery soon helped him away with it, and he let them.

But when it was gone the old necessity for work came back. By day he hardly ever ventured out of his court, for fear of being seen by some one who would attempt to rescue him from his present condition. At night he wandered restlessly about in the narrow streets picking up an early morning job at Covent Garden or in the omnibus stables.

He moved his lodgings incessantly, one week inhabiting a garret in Westminster, another sharing a common room in Whitechapel, another doing without lodgings altogether. He spoke little or not at all to his fellow-miserables, not because he despised them, but because they fought shy of him. They disliked his superior ways and his ill-concealed disgust of their habits and vices. They could have forgiven him for being a criminal in hiding; that they were used to. But a man who spoke like a gentleman, who took no pleasure in their low sports, and sat dumb while they talked loud and broad, seemed to them an interloper and an intruder.

Once—it was about the beginning of August—in a lodging-house across the river, he met a man to whom for a day or two he felt drawn. His story was a sad one. His father had been a gentleman, and the boy had been brought up in luxury and virtue. While at school his father had died, and before he had left school his mother had been married again to a brute who not only broke her heart, but, after setting himself to corrupt his stepson, had at last turned him adrift without a penny in the world. The lad, with no strong principle to uphold him, had sunk deep in vice. Yet there lurked about him occasional flashes of something better.

"After all," he would say to Jeffreys, as the two lay at night almost on bare boards, "what's the odds? I may be miserable one day, but I'm jolly the next. Now you seem to prefer to be uniformly miserable."

"Hardly a case of preference," said Jeffreys; "but I'm not sure that it wouldn't be more miserable to be jolly."

"Try it. You'd give a lot to forget all about everything for an hour, wouldn't you?"

"It would be pleasant."

"You can do it."

"By dropping asleep?"

"Sleep! That's the time I'm most miserable. I remember the old days then, and my mother, and—I say, Jeffreys, I was once nearly drowned at Eton. Just as I was going down for the last time I put up my hand, and a fellow saw it and came in and fished me out. What a born fool I was to do it! I was grateful to the fellow at the time. I hate him now!"

And the poor fellow, with all the manhood out of him, cried himself to sleep; and Jeffreys in mercy said not a word to stop him.

A pitiful sort of friendship sprung up between the two—the bitter strong one, and the vicious weak one. It kept a soft corner in Jeffreys' heart to find some one who held to him even in this degradation, and to the poor prodigal it was worth anything to have some one to talk to.

Coming home one wet morning from one of his nocturnal expeditions, Jeffreys found his fellow-lodger up, with a bottle in his hands.

"My boy, my boy," cried the lad, "you're in luck, and just in time. Who says I'm lost to all decency after this? Why, I might have hidden it away when I heard you coming up. No. There's something of the nobleman left in me yet. Half of this is yours, Jeffreys; only help yourself quickly, man, or I may repent."

He held out the bottle tremblingly and with a wince that spoke volumes.

"Take it. I never went halves before, and perhaps I never shall again."

Jeffreys took the bottle. It was brandy.

"Half a tumbler of that, Jeffreys, will make another man of you. It will send you into dreamland. You'll forget there is such a thing as misery in the world. Don't be squeamish, old fellow. You're cold and weak, you know you are; you ought to take it. You're not too good, surely—eh? Man alive, if you never do anything worse than take a drop of brandy, you'll pass muster. Come, I say, you're keeping me waiting."

Jeffreys sunk on a chair, and raised the bottle half-way to his lips.

What was it, as he did so, which flashed before his eyes and caused him suddenly to set it down and rise to his feet?

Nothing real, it is true, yet nothing new. Just a momentary glimpse of a boy's pale face somewhere in the dim gloom of that little room, and then all was as before. Yet to Jeffreys the whole world was suddenly altered.

He set the bottle down, and neither heeding nor hearing the expostulations of his companion, he left the house never to return.

That night he slept in another part of the town; and the poor bewildered prodigal, deserted by his only friend, cried half the night through, and cursed again the Eton boy who had once saved his life.

Jeffreys, hidden in another part of the great city, sunk to a lower depth of misery than ever. To him it seemed now that his bad name had taken form in the face of young Forrester, and was dogging him in adversity more relentlessly even than in prosperity. It comforted him not at all to think it had saved him from a drunkard's ruin. He despised himself, when he came to himself, for having been scared so weakly. Yet he avoided his old quarters, and turned his back on the one friend he had, rather than face his evil genius again.

His evil genius! Was he blinded then, that he saw in

all this nothing but evil and despair? Was he so numbed that he could not feel a Father's hand leading him even through the mist? Had he forgotten that two little boys far away were praying for him? Had he ceased to feel that young Forrester himself might be somewhere, not far away, ready to forgive?

He was blinded, and could see nothing through the mists.

He half envied his new fellow-lodgers in the den at Ratcliff. Four of them, at least, stood a chance of being hanged. Yet they managed to shake off care and live merrily.

"Come, old gallus," said one young fellow, who in that place was the hero of a recent "mystery" in the West End, "perk up. You're safe enough here. Don't be down. We're all in the same boat. Save up them long faces for eight o'clock in the morning at Old Bailey. Don't spoil our fun."

It was half pathetic, this appeal; and Jeffreys for a day tried to be cheerful. But he could not do it, and considerately went somewhere else.

How long was it to go on? A time came when he could get no work, and starvation stared him in the face. But a dying boy bequeathed him a loaf, and once again he was doomed to live.

But a loaf, and the proceeds of a week's odd jobs, came to an end. And now once more, as he sits in the rain in Regent's Park, he faces something more than the weather. He has not tasted food for two whole days, and for all he knows may never taste it again.

So he sits there, with his eyes still on that football ground, and his ears ringing still with the merry shouts of the departed boys.

The scene changes as he stays on. It is a football field still, but not the brown patch in a London park. There are high trees, throwing shadows across the green turf, and in the distance an old red school-house. And the boys are no longer the lively London urchins with their red, white, and blue bouncer. They are in flannels, and their faces are

familiar, and the names they call each other he knows. Nor is the game the same. It, like the London boys' game, has ended suddenly, but not in a helter-skelter stampede in the rain. No. It is a silent, awe-struck group round something on the ground; and as he, Jeffreys, elbows his way among them, he sees again a boy's face lying there pallid and perhaps lifeless. Then instinctively he lifts his hands to his ears. For a howl rises on all sides which deafens him, stuns him.

After all, it is only the last effort of the October squall in Regent's Park buffeting him with a fusillade of rain and withered leaves. He takes his hands from his ears, and with a sigh gets up and walks away, he cares not whither.

His steps lead him round the park and into the long avenue. The rain and the wind are dying down, and already a few wayfarers, surprised by the sudden storm, are emerging from their shelters and speeding home. The park-keeper boldly parades the path in his water-proof, as if he had braved the elements since daybreak. A nursemaid draws out her perambulator from under the trees and hastens with it and its wailing occupant nurserywards. And there, coming to meet him, sheltered under one umbrella, are two who perhaps have no grudge against the storm for detaining them in their walk that afternoon.

It is long since Jeffreys has seen anything to remind him of the world he has left, but there is something about these two as they advance towards him, their faces hidden by the umbrella, which attracts him. The youth is slim and well-dressed, and holds himself well; his companion's figure reminds him of a form he knew—can it be only six months ago?—light, gentle, courageous, beside which he has walked in the Wildtree Park and on the London pavements. Ah, how changed now!

Where, he wonders, is *she* now? and what is she thinking of him, if she thinks of him at all?

They meet—the tramp and the young couple. They never heed him; how should they? But a turn of the

umbrella gives him a momentary glimpse of them, and in that glimpse poor hapless Jeffreys recognizes Raby and Scarfe!

Surely this blow was not needed to crush him completely! Scarfe!

How long he stood, statue-like, looking down the path by which they had gone neither he nor any one else could tell. But it was dark when he was roused by a harsh voice in front of him.

"Come, sheer off, young fellow! It's time you was out of the park!"

"Yes, I'll go," said he, and walked slowly to the gate.

It was ridiculous of him, of course, to writhe as he did under that chance meeting. What else could he have expected? A hundred times already he had told himself she had forgotten all about him, or, worse still, she remembered him only to despise him. And a hundred times, too, he had seen her in fancy beside the enemy who had stabbed him.

For Scarfe might have spared his precaution in begging Mrs. Rimbolt not to name him as Jeffreys' accuser. Jeffreys needed no telling to whom he owed his ruin, and he needed no telling the reason why.

That reason had made itself clear this afternoon, at any rate, and as the wretched outcast wandered out into the night, it seemed as if the one ray of light which yesterday had glimmered for him, even across the darkness, was now quenched for ever, and that there was nothing left either to hope or dread.

He could not quit the park, but wandered round and round it, outside its inhospitable palings, covering mile after mile of wet pavement, heedless of the now drenching rain, heedless of his hunger, heedless of his failing limbs.

The noisy streets had grown silent, and a clock near at hand had struck two when he found himself on the little bridge which crosses the canal. It was too dark to see the water below, but he heard the hard rain hissing on its surface.

He had stood there before, in happier days, and wondered how men and women could choose, as they sometimes did, to end their misery in that narrow streak of sluggish water.

He wondered less now. Not that he felt tempted to follow them; in his lowest depths of misery that door of escape had never allured him. Yet as he stood he felt fascinated, and even soothed, by the ceaseless noise of the rain on the invisible water beneath. It seemed almost like the voice of a friend far away.

He had been listening for some time, crouched in a dark corner of the parapet, when he became aware of footsteps approaching.

Imagining at first they were those of a policeman coming to dislodge the tramp from his lurking-place, he prepared to get up and move on. But listening again he remained where he was.

The footsteps were not those of a policeman. They approached fitfully, now quickly, now slowly, now stopping still for a moment or two, yet they were too agitated for those of a drunkard, and too uncertain for those of a fugitive from justice.

As they drew near to the bridge they stopped once more, and Jeffreys, peering through the darkness, saw a form clutching the railings, and looking down in the direction of the water. Then a voice groaned, "Oh my God!" and the footsteps hurried on.

Jeffreys had seen misery in many forms go past him before, but something impelled him now to rise and follow the footsteps of this wanderer.

The plashing rain drowned every sound, and it was with difficulty that Jeffreys, weak and weary as he was, could keep pace with the figure flitting before him, for after that glance over the bridge the fugitive no longer halted in his pace, but went on rapidly.

Across the bridge he turned and followed the high banks of the canal. Then he halted, apparently looking for a

way down. It was a long impatient search, but at last Jeffreys saw him descend along some railings which sloped down the steep grass slope almost to the towing-path.

Jeffreys followed with difficulty, and when at last he stood on the towing-path the fugitive was not to be seen, nor was it possible to say whether he had turned right or left.

Jeffreys turned to the right, and anxiously scanning both the bank and the water, tramped along the muddy path.

A few yards down he came upon a heap of stones piled up across the path. Any one clambering across this must have made noise enough to be heard twenty yards away, and, as far as he could judge in the darkness, no one had stepped upon it. He therefore turned back hurriedly and retraced his steps.

The sullen water, hissing still under the heavy rain, gave no sign as he ran along its edge and scanned it with anxious eyes.

The high bank on his left, beyond the palings, became inaccessible from below. The wanderer must, therefore, be before him on the path.

For five minutes he ran on, straining his eyes and ears, when suddenly he stumbled. It was a hat upon the path.

In a moment Jeffreys dived into the cold water. As he came to the surface and looked round there was nothing but the spreading circles of his own plunge to be seen; but a moment afterwards, close to the bank, he had a glimpse of something black rising for an instant and then disappearing. Three strokes brought him to the spot just as the object rose again.

To seize it and strike out for the bank was the work of a moment. The man—for it was he—was alive, and as Jeffreys slowly drew him from the water he opened his eyes and made a faint resistance.

"Let me go!" he said with an oath; "let me go!"

But his head fell heavily on his rescuer's shoulder while he spoke, and when at last he lay on the path he was senseless.

Jeffreys carried him to the shelter of an arch, and there did what he could to restore animation. It was too dark to see the man's face, but he could feel his pulse still beating, and presently he gave a sigh and moved his head.

"What did you do it for?" he said piteously.

Jeffreys started. He knew the voice, hoarse and choked as it was.

"What's your name?" he said, raising the form in his arms and trying to see the face. "Who are you?"

"I've got no name! Why couldn't you let me be?"

"Isn't your name Trimble—Jonah Trimble?"

The poor fellow lifted his head with a little shriek.

"Oh, don't give me up! Don't have me taken up! Help me!"

"I will help you all I can, Trimble."

"Why, you know me, then?—you're— Who are you?"

"I'm John Jeffreys."

CHAPTER XXIV

An Angel Unawares

IN a wretched garret of a house in Storr Alley, near Euston, at the sick-bed of his old enemy, Jeffreys reached a turning-point in his life. How he conveyed the half-drowned Jonah on the night of the rescue from the canal bank to his lodgings he scarcely knew.

The hand of a friend is often near when it is least expected. So Jonah had found, when he believed all hope and life to be gone; and so Jeffreys had found, when, with his poor burden in his arms, he met, beside a barge at daybreak, a dealer in vegetables for whom he had sometimes worked at Covent Garden, and who now, like a Good Samaritan, not only gave the two a lift in his cart, but provided Jeffreys with an opportunity of earning a shilling on the way.

This shilling worked marvels. For both Trimble and Jeffreys were on the verge of starvation; and without food that night rescue would have been but a farce.

It was soon evident that Jonah had far more the matter with him than the mere effects of his immersion. He was a wreck, body and soul. The dispensary doctor who called to see him gave him a fortnight to live, and the one or two brave souls who penetrated, on errands of mercy, even into Storr Alley, marked his hollow cough and sunken cheeks, and knew that before long one name more would drop out of their lists.

It was slowly, and in fragments only, that Jeffreys heard

his story. Jonah was for ever reproaching him with what had happened on the canal bank.

"Why couldn't you have left a fellow alone? I know, you wanted to gloat over me. Go on, be as happy as you like. Enjoy your revenge. I did you a bad turn; now you've done me one, so we're quits!"

Here a fit of coughing would shake the breath out of the sufferer, and it would be a minute or two before he could proceed.

Jeffreys wisely avoided all expostulations or self-excuse. He smoothed the poor fellow's pillow, and supported him in his arms till the cough was over and he could proceed.

"It was a bad day you ever came to our school, John"—Jonah had adopted the name by which Jeffreys was known in Storr Alley—"I hated you the first time I saw you. You've got the laugh on your side now; but I can tell you you wouldn't have had it then if you knew the way I followed you up. Yes"—and here came a shadow of his own sinister smile—"I made it all fit in like a puzzle. Did you never miss a letter you had that day you called at the York post office—a letter about the dead burying their dead, and young Forrester? oh yes, you may start; I know all about it. I took that letter out of your pocket. And I know where you buried his body; do you suppose I didn't see you throw yourself on the very place and say, 'It was here'? You held your nose in the air, didn't you, in the school, and palmed yourself off on Freddy and Teddy for a model? But I bowled you out. I showed you up. That was the day of my laugh. Now you've got yours."

The cough again stopped him; and when he recovered his breath Jeffreys said quietly—

"Don't talk, Jonah; you bring on your cough. Let me read to you."

Then for the remainder of that day the story would rest; till later on Jonah would abruptly return to it.

"Mother believed in you, and cried a whole day after you had gone. Yes, and you'll be glad to hear the school

broke up all to pieces. Farmer Rosher took away his boys and spread a report about us; and at the end of a month we had scarcely a dozen urchins. Mother and I lived like cat and dog. I struck work, and she had to do everything, and it broke her up. It would never have happened if you hadn't come into the place. I couldn't live there any longer. Mother had a little bit saved, fifty pounds or so, and one night, after we had had a terrible row, I took every penny of it out of her money-box and came up to London. Now are you pleased? Hadn't she something to bless you for? I say, John, get us some water quick, I'm parched!"

On another day Jeffreys heard the rest.

"I came up to London, but it wasn't the fun I expected. Everybody I met I thought was a detective, and all night long I dreamed of my mother. I tried to drown it, and lived as wild a life as you like till my money was done. Then it would have been worth your while to see me. Everybody was against me. Fellows I'd stood treat to kicked me out into the street, and fellows who owed me money laughed in my face. I thought I'd go back to York after all and get mother to take me back; but when I came to start I couldn't face it. That's all. I stood it as long as I could. I pawned everything, and when that was done I stole—and got three months on the treadmill. How do you like that? When I got out, a city missionary heard of me and found me a job; but I stole again, and ran away. You wouldn't have thought I had it in me at York, would you? I was a respectable young fellow there. But it was all there; and it was you brought it all out. Last week I made up my mind to put an end to it all. It took me a struggle to face it; but I was settled to do it—and then, as if you hadn't done enough harm, you come and spoil my last chance."

"Not your last chance, Jonah."

"No. I've a week more to live. Then you'll be rid of me. Who's to save me then?"

"Some one, Jonah. We have both forgotten Him, but He's not forgotten us."

"Oh yes, I know," said Jonah; "but it's all very well for you, who've got years to get right in. It's too short notice for me to begin all that over again. I don't want to hear about it."

He lingered on day after day, and it was absolutely necessary for Jeffreys to go and seek work in order to keep even that wretched roof above their heads.

One evening when he returned with a few coppers, Jonah met him with a face brighter than any that he had yet seen.

"I've had some one here to-day. A better sort than you. One that's got a right to talk about what's better. A lady, John, or else an angel. Did *you* send her?"

"I? No; I know no ladies."

"I don't know how it was, I could tell her anything—and, I say, John, it would make you cry to hear her voice. It did me. *You* never made me cry, or saw me; I hate to hear *you* preach; but she—why, she doesn't preach at all, but she says all you've got to say a hundred times better."

He was excited and feverish that night, and in his sleep murmured scraps of the gentle talk of his ministering angel, which even from his lips fell with a reflected sweetness on the trouble-tossed spirit of the watcher.

Jeffreys had succeeded in getting a temporary job which took him away during the next two days. But each night on his return he found his invalid brighter and softened in spirit by reason of his angel's visits.

"She'll come to-morrow, John. There's magic in her, I tell you. I see things I never saw before. You've been kind to me, John, and given up a lot for me, but if you were to hear her——"

Here the dying youth could get no farther.

He seemed much the same in the morning when Jeffreys started for work. The last words he said as his friend departed were—

"She's coming again to-day."

When Jeffreys came home in the evening the garret was silent, and on the bed lay all that remained on earth of the

poor wrecked life which had been so strangely linked with his own.

As he stood over the lifeless body his eyes fell on a scrap of paper lying on the pillow. It was folded and addressed in pencil, "To the fellow-lodger."

Jeffreys caught it eagerly, and in a turmoil of agitation read the few lines within.

"Your friend was not alone when he died, peacefully, this afternoon. He left a message for you. 'Tell him he was right when he told me I had a chance. If it had not been for him I should have lost it.' He also said, 'Some day he may see mother and tell her about me. Tell her I died better than I lived.' Dear friend, whose name I do not know, don't lose heart. God is merciful, and will be your friend when every one else is taken from you."

It was not the words of this touching little message from the dead which brought a gasp to Jeffreys' throat and sent the colour from his cheeks as he read it. The writing, hasty and agitated as it was, was a hand he had seen before. He had in his pocket an envelope, well worn now, addressed to him months ago in the same writing, and as he held the two side by side he knew Raby had written both.

He quitted the garret hurriedly, and entered the room of a family of five who lived below him.

"Mrs. Pratt," said he to the ragged woman who sat nursing her baby in the corner, "did you see who Trimble had with him when he died?"

"He's dead, then, sir"—these fellow-lodgers of Jeffreys called him "sir" in spite of his misery. "I knew that cough couldn't last. My Annie's begun with it: she'll go to. It's been hard enough to keep the children, but it will be harder to lose them!" she cried.

Jeffreys went to the bed where the little consumptive girl lay in a restless sleep, breathing heavily.

"Poor little Annie!" said he; "I did not know she was so ill."

"How could you? Yes, I saw the lady come down—

a pretty wee thing. She comes and goes here. Maybe when she hears of Annie she'll come to her."

"Do you know her name?"

"No. She's a lady, they say. I heard her singing upstairs to Trimble; it was a treat! So Trimble's dead. You'll be glad of some help, I expect? If you'll mind the children, Mr. John, I'll go up and do the best we can for the poor fellow."

And so Jeffreys, with the baby in his arms, sat beside the little invalid in that lonely room, while the mother, putting aside her own sorrows, went up and did a woman's service where it was most needed.

Next day he had the garret to himself.

That letter—how he treasured it!—changed life for him. He had expected, when Jonah's illness ended, to drift back once more into the bitterness of despair. But that was impossible now.

He made no attempt to see the angel of whose visits to the alley he now and again heard. Indeed, whether he was in work or not, he left early and came back late on purpose to avoid a meeting. He had long been known by his neighbours only as John, so that there was no chance of her discovering who he was. Sometimes the memory of that October day in Regent's Park came up to haunt him and poison even the comfort of the little letter. Yet why should she not have forgotten him? and why should not Scarfe, the man with a character, be more to her than he, the man with none? Yet he tried bravely to banish all, save the one thought that it *was* she who bade him hope and take courage.

He worked well and patiently at the temporary manual labour on which he was employed, and when that came to an end he looked about resolutely for more.

Meanwhile—do not smile, reader—he made an investment of capital! In other words, he spent threepence in pen, ink, paper, and a candle, and spent one night in his lonely garret writing. It was a letter, addressed to a stranger, on a public question. In other words, it was an article to a London

paper on, " Life in a Slum, by One who Lives There." It was a quiet, unsensational paper, with some practical suggestions for the improvement of poor people's dwellings, and a few true stories of experiences in which the writer himself had taken a part.

He dropped it doubtfully into the editor's box and tried to forget about it. He dared not look at the paper next day, and when two days passed and he heard nothing, he concluded that the bolt had missed fire.

But it was not so. A week later, the postman entered Storr Alley—an unheard of event—and left a letter. It contained a money order for ten shillings, and read:—

" The editor encloses ten shillings for the letter on Slum Life, contributed by Mr. John to the paper of the 23rd. He can take two more on the same subject at the same terms, and suggests that Mr. John should deal specially with ——" And here the editor gave an outline of the topics on which the public would be most likely to desire information.

With overflowing heart, and giving Raby the credit, he sat down and wrote the two articles.

His first half-sovereign went in a deed of mercy. Little Annie lay dead in her bed the night it arrived. Jeffreys that morning, before he started to work, had watched the little spark of life flicker for the last time and go out. The mother, worn out by her constant vigils, lay ill beside her dead child. The father, a drunkard, out of work, deserted the place, and the two other children, the baby, and the sister scarcely more than baby, wailed all day for cold and hunger. What could he do but devote the first-fruits of his pen to these companions in distress? The half-sovereign sufficed for the child's funeral, with a little over for the sick mother. For the rest, he took the baby to his own garret for a night or two, and tended it there as best he could.

The two fresh letters to the paper in due time brought a sovereign; but at the same time a chilling notification to the effect that the editor did not need further contributions,

and would let Mr. John know if at any future time he required his services.

It was the abrupt closing of one door of promise. Still Jeffreys, with hope big within him, did not sit and fret.

Literary work might yet be had, and meanwhile bodily labour must be endured.

Towards the beginning of December, any one taking up one of the London penny papers might have observed, had he been given to the study of such matters, three advertisements. Here they are in their proper order:—

> "Should this meet the eye of John Jeffreys, late private secretary to a gentleman in Cumberland, he is earnestly requested to communicate with his friend and late employer."

Readers of the agony column were getting tired of this advertisement. It had appeared once a week for the last six months, and was getting stale by this time.

The next advertisement was more recent, but still a trifle dull:—

> "GERARD FORRESTER.—If Gerard Forrester (son of the late Captain Forrester, of the — Hussars) who was last heard of at Bolsover School, in October, 18—, where he met with a serious accident, should see this, he is requested to communicate with Messrs. Wilkins & Wilkins, Solicitors, Blank Street, W.C., from whom he will hear something to his advantage. Any person able to give satisfactory information leading to the discovery of the said Gerard Forrester, or, in the event of his death, producing evidence of his decease, will be liberally rewarded."

The third advertisement, in another column, appeared now for the first time:—

"A YOUNG man, well educated, and a careful student of Bibliography, is anxious for literary work. Searches made and extracts copied.—Apply, J., 28A, Storr Alley, W.C."

It would have puzzled any ordinary observer to detect in these three appeals anything to connect them together. Jeffreys, however, glancing down the columns of the borrowed paper for a sight of his own advertisement, started and turned pale as his eye fell first on his own name, then on Forrester's.

It was like a conspiracy to bewilder and baffle him at the moment when hope seemed to be returning. He had convinced himself that his one chance was to break with every tie which bound him to his old life, and to start afresh from the lowest step of all. And here, at the outset, there met him two calls from that old life, both of which it was hard to resist. Mr. Rimbolt, he decided to resist at all hazards. He still shuddered as he recalled the stiff rustle of a certain silk dress in Clarges Street, and preferred his present privations a hundredfold. Even the thought of Percy, and the library, and Mr. Rimbolt's goodness, could not efface that one overpowering impression.

The other advertisement perplexed and agitated him more. Who was this unknown person on whose behalf Messrs Wilkins & Wilkins were seeking information respecting young Forrester? It might be Scarfe, or Mr. Frampton, or possibly some unheard-of relative, interested in the disposal of the late gallant officer's effects. He could not assist the search. The little he knew was probably already known to the lawyers, yet it excited him wildly to think that some one besides himself was in search of the lad whose memory had haunted him for so many months, and whom, even in his most despairing moments, he had never quite given up for lost.

True, he had long since ceased to believe that he was really to be found by searching. Everything combined

to baffle search, almost to forbid it, and yet he had constantly lived in a vague expectation of finding or hearing of him some day accidentally and unawares. But this advertisement filled him with self-reproach. What right had he to do anything, to rest a day, till he had found this lost boy—lost by his fault, by his sin? No wonder he had not prospered. No wonder the bad name had haunted him and dragged him down!

One thing was certain—whether what he knew was known to others or not, it was his duty to aid now in this new search. So he wrote as follows to Messrs. Wilkins & Wilkins:—

"*Private and Confidential.*

"The writer of this knew Gerard Forrester at Bolsover School two years ago, and was responsible almost wholly for the accident referred to. The writer left Bolsover in consequence, and has not seen Forrester since. In May of the following year he made inquiries at Grangerham, Forrester's native place, where he ascertained that the boy had been removed there from Bolsover and had remained for some time with his grandmother, Mrs. Wilcox. Mrs. Wilcox, however, was ordered to the South for her health, and died at Torquay. Forrester, who appears to have been a cripple, and unable to help himself, was then left in charge of his old nurse, who left Grangerham shortly afterwards, it is said, in order to take the boy to a hospital—where, no one could say That is the last the writer heard. Messrs. W. & W. might do well to apply to the clergyman and Wesleyan minister at Grangerham, who may have some later news. The writer would be thankful to be of any service in helping to find one whom he has so terribly wronged; and any letter addressed 'J., at Jones's Coffee House, Drury Jane,' will find him.

"It should be said that when Forrester was last seen, only faint hopes were held out as to his recovery, even as a cripple."

An anxious time followed. It was hard to work as usual

—harder still to wait. The idea of Forrester being after all found took strange possession of his mind, to the exclusion of all else. The prospect which had seemed to open before him appeared suddenly blocked; he could think of nothing ahead except that one possible meeting.

So preoccupied was he, that his own advertisement for work was forgotten the day after it appeared; and when two days later he found a letter pushed under the door, his heart leaped to his mouth with the conviction that it could refer to nothing but the one object before him. It did not; it was a reply to his advertisement.

"J—— is requested to call to-morrow, at 10 a.m., on Mr. Trotter, 6, Porson Square, in reference to his advertisement for literary work."

With some trepidation, and no particular expectations, Jeffreys presented himself at the appointed time, and found himself face to face with a testy little gentleman, with by no means large pretensions to literary authority.

He took in the shabby-looking advertiser at a glance, and suited his tone accordingly.

"So you're the chap, are you? You're the nice educated literary chap that wants a job, eh?"

"I am."

"What can you do? Write poetry?"

"I never tried."

"Write 'istory, or 'igh hart, and that sort of thing?"

"I have not tried. I know mostly about bibliography."

"Bibli—who? You'll turn your 'and to anything for a crust, I suppose. Do you ever do anything in the puff line?"

Jeffreys admitted he had not.

"'Cos I want a chap to crack up my 'Polyglot Pickle' in proper literary style. None of your commonplace maunderings, but something smart and startling. What do you say? Can you do it or not?"

Jeffreys heart sank low. "I'll try——"

"Can you do it?" demanded the proud inventor,

"Yes," said Jeffreys desperately.

"All right," said Mr. Trotter, greatly relieved. "I want a book of twenty pages. Write anything you like, only bring the pickles in on each page. You know the style. Twenty blood-curdling ballads, or Æsop's fables, or something the public's bound to read. Something racy, mind, and all ending in the pickle. It's a good thing, so you needn't be afraid of overdoing it. You shall have a bob a page, money down, or twenty-five bob for the lot if you let me have it this time to-morrow. Remember, nothing meek and mild. Lay it on thick. They're the best thing going, and got a good name. Polyglot, that's many tongues; everybody tastes 'em."

Jeffreys, with a dismal sense of the humour of the situation, accepted his noble task meekly, and sat down in Mr. Trotter's back room with a bottle of the pickles on the table before him.

The reader shall be spared the rubbish he wrote. To this day he flares up angrily if you so much as mention the Polyglot Pickle to him.

The public, who laughed next week over the ridiculous bathos of those twenty loud-sounding ballads, little guessed the misery and disgust they had cost their author.

The one part of the whole business that was not odious was that in six hours Jeffreys had twenty-five shillings in his pocket; and to him twenty-five shillings meant a clear week and more in which to devote himself to the now all-absorbing task of seeking young Forrester.

On his way back to Storr Alley that evening he called as usual at the coffee-house, and found a further letter awaiting him:—

"Messrs. Wilkins & Wilkins will be much obliged if the writer of the letter of the sixth inst. will favour them with a call on Wednesday forenoon, as he may be able to assist them materially in the search in which they are engaged. Messrs. W. & W. will treat an interview as confidential."

CHAPTER XXV

High Dudgeon

THINGS had not been going well with Percy Rimbolt since we saw him last, six or eight months ago, just before Jeffreys' expulsion from the house in Clarges Street. Mrs. Rimbolt had some reason to modify her self-congratulations on that occasion, when Percy and Raby, who, it will be remembered, had been out riding at the time, returned home. Percy returned in high spirits; his new horse had turned out a beauty, and the canter in the park had acted like a tonic.

"Hullo, mother!" he said, as his parent came into the hall to meet him. "We've had a grand time, Raby and I. We saw the Prince of Wales and W. G. Grace, and the Queen, and everybody, and I gave Raby two hundred yards from the corner and ran her down before we were off Knightsbridge, and nearly got hauled up for furious riding. I say, I mean to make father get a horse for old Jeff, and we'll go out early in the mornings, when the Row's empty, and try handicaps, eh, Raby? Where's Jeff, I say?" and he ran whistling upstairs.

His mother, with some premonitory misgivings followed him.

"Where are you, Jeff?" she heard him shout. "I say, mother," he added, as Mrs. Rimbolt approached, "where's Jeff? Is he out?"

"He is," said Mrs. Rimbolt solemnly. "I want to speak to you, Percy."

"All right. But I say, when will he be in? He said he couldn't leave his work this afternoon. I want him to see Bendigo before he goes round to the stables."

"You had better tell the groom he need not wait, and then please come to my room, Percy," said Mrs. Rimbolt.

Percy shouted down to Walker to send away the horse, and followed his mother into her boudoir.

"Percy, my dear boy," began the lady, "I am sorry to say I have just had to perform a very unpleasant duty. You can hardly understand——"

"What about—anything about Jeff?" interrupted the boy, jumping at the truth.

"It is. It has been necessary, for everybody's sake, that he should leave here."

"What!" thundered Percy, turning pale and clutching the back of his chair; "you've sent Jeff away—kicked him out?"

"Come, Percy, don't be unreasonable. I——"

"When did he go—how long ago?" exclaimed the boy, half frantic.

"Percy, you really——"

"How long ago?"

"It is more than an hour since——"

Percy waited to hear no more; he dashed down the stairs and shouted to Walker.

"Did you see Jeffreys go? Which way did he go?"

"I didn't see——"

"Come and help me look for him, he's sure to be about. Tell Appleby, do you hear? Raby, I say," he exclaimed, as his cousin appeared in the hall, "Jeff's been kicked out an hour ago! I'm going to find him!" and the poor lad, with a heart almost bursting, flung open the door and rushed out into the street.

Alas! it was a fool's errand, and he knew it. Still, he could not endure to do nothing.

After two weary hours he gave it up, and returned home dispirited and furious. Walker and Appleby had taken

much less time to appreciate the uselessness of the search, and had returned an hour ago from a perfunctory walk round one or two neighbouring streets.

Our young Achilles, terrible in his wrath, would see no one, not even his mother, not even Raby. Once or twice that evening they heard the front door slam, and knew he once more was on the look-out. Mrs. Rimbolt, alarmed at the storm which she had raised, already repented of her haste, and telegraphed to Mr. Rimbolt to come to London.

Raby, bewildered and miserable, shut herself up in her room and was seen by no one. It was a wretched night for everybody; and when next morning Mrs. Rimbolt, sitting down to breakfast, was met with the news that neither Master Percy nor Miss Raby wanted breakfast, she began to feel that the affair was being overdone.

When Mr. Rimbolt arrived, though he concealed his feelings better, he was perhaps the most mortified of all at the wretched misadventure which during his absence had turned Jeffreys adrift beyond recall. He had known his secretary's secret, and had held it sacred even from his wife. And watching Jeffreys' brave struggle to live down his bad name, he had grown to respect and even admire him, and to feel a personal interest in the ultimate success of his effort. Now, a miserable accident, which, had he been at home, could have been prevented by a word, had wrecked the work and the hopes of years, and put beyond Mr. Rimbolt's power all further chance of helping it on.

About a week after Mr. Rimbolt's return, when all but Percy were beginning to settle down again into a semblance of their old order of things, Raby knocked at her uncle's door and inquired if he was busy. She looked happier than he had seen her since his return. The reason was easy to guess. The post had brought her a letter from her father.

"I thought you would like to see it," said she. "He has got leave at last, and expects to be home at the end of September. Will you read the letter?" added she, colouring; "there's something else in it I should like you to see."

The letter was chiefly about the prospects of coming home. Towards the close Lieut.-Col. Atherton (for he had got promotion) wrote:

"You ask me to tell you about poor Forrester and his family.

"He had no wife alive, and when he died did not know what had become of his only son. The boy was at school in England—Bolsover School—and met with an accident, caused, it is said, by the spite of a schoolfellow, which nearly killed him, and wholly crippled him. He was taken home to his grandmother's, but after she died he disappeared, and poor Forrester had been unable to hear anything about him. It is a sad story. I promised Forrester when I got home I would do what I could to find the boy and take care of him. You will help, won't you?"

Raby watched her uncle as he read the passage, and then asked,—

"I asked father to tell me something about the Forresters, uncle, because some one—it was Mr. Scarfe—had told me that he believed Captain Forrester was the father of an old schoolfellow of his at Bolsover who had a bad accident."

"Is that all he told you?" asked her uncle.

"No," said Raby, flushing; "he told me that Mr. Jeffreys had been the cause of the accident.

"That was so, said Mr. Rimbolt. "Sit down, child, and I'll tell you all about it."

And her uncle told her what he had heard from Mr. Frampton, and what Jeffreys had suffered in consequence; how he had struggled to atone for the past, and what hopes had been his as to the future. Raby's face glowed more and more as she listened. It was a different soldier's tale from what she was used to; but still it moved her pity and sympathy strangely.

"It's a sad story, as your father says," concluded Mr. Rimbolt; "but the sadness does not all belong to young Forrester."

Raby's eyes sparkled.

"No, indeed," said she; "it is like shipwreck within sight of the harbour."

"We can only hope there may be some hand to save him even from these depths," said Mr. Rimbolt; "for, from what I know of Jeffreys, he will find it hard now to keep his head above water. Of course, Raby, I have only told you this because you have heard the story from another point of view which does poor Jeffreys injustice."

"I am so grateful to you," said the girl.

Mr. Rimbolt let her go without saying more. Even the man of books had eyes that could see; and Raby's face during this interview had told a tale of something more than casual sympathy.

The season dragged on, and nothing occurred to mend matters at Clarges Street. Percy moped and could settle down to nothing. He spurned his books, he neglected his horse, and gave up the river entirely. It was vain to reason or expostulate with him, and after a couple of months his parents marked with anxiety that the boy was really ill. Yet nothing would induce him to quit London. Even his father's offer to take him abroad for a few weeks did not tempt him.

Raby herself made the final appeal the day before they started.

"Percy, dear, won't you come for my sake?" said she.

"If I came for anybody I would for you," replied he, "but I can't."

"But I had so looked forward to you seeing father."

"I'll see him as soon as he gets to town."

"It will spoil my pleasure so much," said she. "I shall be miserable thinking of you."

"You're an awful brick, Raby; but don't bother about me. You'd all be ever so much more miserable if I came, and so should I."

"But what good can it do?" pleaded his cousin.

"I don't know—he might turn up. I might find him after all. If it hadn't been for your father coming, Raby—

I'd have begged you to stay too. He'd be more likely to come if he knew *you* were here."

Raby flushed. Between Percy and his cousin there was no hypocrisy.

"Oh, Percy," she said, "do you want to make me fifty times more miserable?" And she gave up further attempt to move him.

The travellers were away a month, during which time Percy kept his lonely vigil at Clarges Street. As the reader knows, it was useless. Jeffreys was never near the place, and the lad, watching day after day, began slowly to lose hope.

But that month's experience was not wholly wasted. Memories of bygone talks with his friend, of good advice given, and quiet example unheeded at the time, crowded in on Percy's memory now; adding to his sense of loss, certainly, but reminding him that there was something else to be done than mope and fret.

What would Jeffreys have had him do? he often asked himself; and the answer was plain and direct—work. That had always been Jeffreys' cure for everything. That is what he would have done himself, and that is what Percy, chastened by his loss, made up his mind to now.

He got out his old books and his tools, and doggedly took up the work where he had left it. It was uphill, cheerless work, but he was better for it, and the memory of his lost friend became none the less dear for the relief it brought him.

Only one incident marked his solitary month at Clarges Street—that was a visit from Scarfe about a fortnight after the travellers had gone. Percy had a very shrewd guess, although he had never heard it in so many words, who was responsible for Jeffreys' disgrace and dismissal; and that being so, it is not to be wondered at that his welcome of the visitor was not very cordial.

"Look here," said he, as Scarfe entered, and making no movement to return his greeting, "is it true you were the

fellow who told mother about Jeff, and had him sent away from here ?"

"My dear Percy——"

"I'm not your dear Percy! Did you tell mother that story about Jeffreys ?"

"Why, Percy, you don't mean to say——"

"Shut up! You can Yes or No, can't you ?"

"I did my duty, and it's a mercy you're all rid of him!" said Scarfe, losing temper at being thus browbeaten by a boy of Percy's age.

"Very well, you can go! You're a cad, and you're not wanted here!" said Percy.

"You young prig!" began the visitor; but Percy stopped him.

"Look here," said he, "if you want to fight, say so, and come on! If you don't, go! You're a cad!"

Scarfe was staggered by this outbreak; he never suspected the boy had it in him. He tried to turn the matter off with a laugh.

"Come, don't be a muff, Percy! You and I are old friends——"

"We're not; we're enemies!"

"You mean to say," said Scarfe, with a snarl, "you're going to throw me up for the sake of a——"

"Don't say a word about Jeff!" said Percy, white-hot, and springing to his feet; "if you do I'll have you pitched neck and crop into the street! Hook it! No one asked you here, and you're not wanted!"

"I came to see your mother," said Scarfe. "I can't congratulate you, Percy, on your hospitality, but I can hope you'll be better next time I come."

Percy went out after him, and called down the staircase to Walker, "Walker, give Mr. Scarfe a glass of wine and some grub before he goes."

The taunt about hospitality had stung him, and this was how he relieved his conscience on that point.

Scarfe was not the only visitor Percy had. The evening

before the travellers were expected home Walker announced that a gentleman had called inquiring for Mr. Rimbolt, but hearing he was from home, desired to speak with his son. Percy, ready to clutch at any straw of hope, and jumping at once to the conclusion that the only business on which any one could possibly call at the house was about Jeffreys, told Walker to show the gentleman up.

He was a dark, handsome man, with a few streaks of grey in his hair, and a keen, cold look in his eye which Percy mistrusted.

"We're old friends, I fancy," said he, nodding to the boy as he entered. "At least, I fancy I saw you sixteen or seventeen years ago."

"I must have been jolly young then," said Percy.

"You were—about a week. Your father and I were college friends. I gave him up as a deserter when he married, and might have cut his acquaintance altogether, only as he happened to marry my sister, I was bound to keep up appearances and come and inspect my nephew when he made his appearance."

"You're my Uncle Halgrove, then? I thought you were dead."

"I sympathize keenly with your disappointment. I am alive and well, and hoped to find my brother-in-law at home."

"They'll be back to-morrow," said Percy.

"Have you dined, my boy?"

"No, not yet."

"That's well; they can lay for two. I'll sleep here to-night."

Percy scrutinized his uncle critically.

"Look here, uncle," he said, rather nervously, "it may be all right, you know, and I'd be awfully sorry not to be civil. But I never saw you before, and didn't know you were alive. So I think you'd better perhaps stay at your hotel to-night and come to-morrow, when they all come home. Do you mind?"

"Mind?" said Mr. Halgrove. "I'm delighted if you

are. You prefer solitude, so do I. Or perhaps you've been a naughty boy, and are left behind for your sins."

"I've stayed behind because I didn't want to go," said Percy.

"Well," said Mr. Halgrove, "I am sure your relatives are the sufferers by your decision. By the way, one of the things I came to see your father about was to ask him to help me out of a money difficulty. I've just landed from America, and my remittances are not here to meet me. Consequently I am in the ridiculous position of not being able to pay for the luxury of an hotel. But I understand there are nice clean railway-arches at Victoria, and that crusts are frequently to be met with in the gutters if one keeps his eye open."

Percy was perplexed.

"Do you mean you're really hard up?" said he, "because if you really are, of course you'd better put up here."

"But I may be a fraud, you know. I may rob the house and murder you in your bed," said his uncle, "and that would be a pity."

"I'll take my chance of that," said Percy.

And so it happened that the house in Clarges Street had a visitor on the last night of Percy's lonely month. The boy and his uncle began the evening with a great deal of suspicion and mutual aversion. But it wore off as the hours passed. Mr. Halgrove had a fund of stories to tell, and the boy was a good listener; and when at last they adjourned to bed they were on friendly terms.

Percy, however, took the precaution to take away the front-door key, so that the visitor could not abscond from the house during the night without his knowledge. The precaution was unnecessary. Mr. Halgrove rang his bell for shaving water at ten next morning with the confidence of one who had lived in the house all his life. A few hours later the travellers arrived in London.

CHAPTER XXVI

Hide and Seek

PERCY was in considerable difficulty as to the ceremonies to be observed in welcoming his family home. For he had no notion of leaving the house in possession of his suspicious uncle while he went down to the station. Nor could he bear the idea of not being at the station to meet them. So he compromised matters by taking his complaisant relative with him, much to that gentleman's amusement.

It relieved him considerably, when the train arrived, to see that his mother recognized the stranger, though not effusively, as her veritable brother. He was thus able to devote his whole attention to his other uncle, whom he found considerably more interesting.

Colonel Atherton arrived in high spirits, like a schoolboy home for a holiday. He struck up an alliance with Percy at once, and insisted on taking him off to the apartments near Regent's Park which were to be his and Raby's home for the next few months. As he was saying good-bye to the Rimbolts, he caught sight for the first time of Mr. Halgrove.

"Why, bless me, is that you, Halgrove?" he said. "Why, I've worn mourning for you, my boy. This is a bit of sharp practice. Where did you spring from?"

"Perhaps I'm a ghost, after all. So many people have told me lately I'm dead, that I begin to believe it."

"Never fear. If you were a ghost we should be able to

see through you—that's more than anybody ever did with Halgrove, eh, Rimbolt ?"

"Halgrove is coming home with us," said Mr. Rimbolt, "so when you and Raby come to-morrow we can talk over old times."

"Who would have thought of him turning up ?" said the colonel to his daughter as with Percy they drove off in their cab. "Why, I've not heard of him since that affair of poor Jeffreys, and——"

"Jeffreys !" exclaimed Percy, with a suddenness that startled the gallant officer ; "did you say Jeffreys ?"

"Yes, what about him ? It was long before your time—a dozen or fourteen years ago."

"Why, he couldn't have been more than eight then ; what happened to him, uncle, I say ?"

The boy asked his question so eagerly and anxiously that it was evident it was not a case of idle curiosity.

"You must be meaning the son ; I'm talking about the father. Wait till we get home, my boy, and you shall hear."

It required all Percy's patience to wait. The very mention of his friend's name had excited him. It never occurred to him there were hundreds of Jeffreys in the world, and that his uncle and he might be interested in quite different persons. For him there was but one Jeffreys in the universe, and he jumped at any straw of hope of finding him.

The reader knows all Colonel Atherton was able to tell Percy and Raby—for Raby was not an uninterested listener—of the story of Mr. Halgrove's partner. Percy in turn told what he knew of his Jeffreys ; and putting the two stories together, it seemed pretty clear it was a history of parent and son.

Early next morning the colonel was at Clarges Street, seated in the study with his two old college friends.

"Well," said he "here's a case of we three meeting again with a vengeance. And what have you been up to, Halgrove, these twenty years ? No good, I'll be bound."

"I have at least managed to keep clear of matrimony,"

said Mr. Halgrove, " which is more than either of you virtuous family men can say."

" Ah, well," said the colonel, with a sigh, " that's not all misfortune—witness my sweet daughter and Rimbolt's fine boy. What have you got to show against that ? "

" Nothing, I confess."

" By the way, though, haven't you ? The last I heard of you was in the papers ; a record of a generous act on your part. You had adopted the son of an unfortunate partner of yours who had died. Is he still with you ? "

" No," said Mr. Halgrove ; " that turned out an unfortunate speculation in every way."

" Did the boy bolt ? "

" Not exactly. I sent him to a first-rate school, where he distinguished himself in a way of his own by an act of homicide."

" What ? " exclaimed the colonel ; and Mr. Rimbolt suddenly became attentive.

" Yes. He either quite or very nearly did for a young schoolfellow in a fit of the tantrums, and found it convenient to quit the place rather abruptly."

" What was the name of the school ? " asked Mr. Rimbolt quietly.

" Bolsover, in ——shire."

" Singular ! " exclaimed the colonel. " I had a chum in India who had a boy at that very school."

Here the speaker became aware of a sharp kick under the table and a significant look from Mr. Rimbolt. The old soldier was used to obey the word of command at a moment's notice and pulled up now.

" I should think a thing like that would be very bad for the school," said Mr. Rimbolt quietly, and in an offhand way.

" Fatal," said Mr. Halgrove. " I believe Bolsover went to the dogs after it."

" And so you had—you had young—what was his name ? "

" Jeffreys."

" Young Jeffreys on your hands ? "

"Scarcely. We parted company. As I told him, I never was particular, but a man must draw the line somewhere, and I drew it at manslaughter."

"What became of him?"

"Well, before I went abroad he was usher in a dame school in York. He may be there still, unless by this time all his pupils are devoured."

"Very unpleasant business for you," said Mr. Rimbolt.

"And," asked the colonel, with a wink at his brother-in-law, "did he, like the prodigal, take his portion of goods with him? I mean what his father left him."

Mr. Halgrove for a moment raised his brows uncomfortably.

"No," said he; "Benjamin Jeffreys was an eccentric man, and invested his money in eccentric securities. His son's money, like the lad himself, went to the dogs, and left me decidedly out of pocket by my term of guardianship. I really advise neither of you to indulge your philanthropy in adopting somebody else's sons; it doesn't pay."

"Yours certainly was not a lucky experience," said Mr. Rimbolt; "however, when you were last heard of, Fame reported that you could afford to drop a little."

"*Fama volat*, and so does money. No one could repeat the libel now with truth. The fact is, this visit to an old college friend is a trifle interested. My journey to the West has turned out badly, and, greatly as I should like it, I could not offer to lend either of you fellows a hundred pounds at this present moment. So I hope you won't ask me."

The talk here took a financial turn, and Mrs. Rimbolt presently joining the party, she and her brother were left to themselves while Mr. Rimbolt and the colonel took a short stroll.

Mr. Rimbolt took the opportunity of telling his brother-in-law what he knew, not only of Jeffreys but of young Forrester, and the colonel told him of his obligation to find if possible the child of his dead companion-in-arms.

"It's a mixed-up business altogether," said he, "and from all I can judge something of a family matter. My little

girl, Rimbolt, whom you've been so good to, seems to me more interested in this librarian of yours than she would like any one to suspect—eh ?"

"I have fancied so," said Mr. Rimbolt, "sometimes."

"Pleasant to come home and find everybody in the dumps about some person one has never seen. The sooner the rascal comes to light, the better for everybody and for my holiday. By the way, Rimbolt, that struck me as fishy about Jeffreys' money, didn't it you ?"

"It did. I had never heard anything about Halgrove having a partner."

"I had. He went out of his mind and died by his own hand; but from what I knew of Halgrove then, I should say it was *he* who had a weakness for eccentric speculations. However, the money's gone; so it's all the same for young Jeffreys."

Raby found her life at Regent's Park very different from that either at Wildtree or Clarges Street. Colonel Atherton was a man who hated ceremony of any kind, and had a great idea of letting everybody do as they chose. Raby consequently found herself her own mistress in a way she had never experienced before. It was not altogether a delightful sensation; for though she loved her father's companionship and the care of looking after his wants, she often felt the time hang heavy on her hands.

The colonel had a number of old friends to look up, and a great deal of business to do; and Raby, used to company of some sort, found his absences lonely. Percy was often at the house, but he in his present dismal mood was poor company. His one topic was Jeffreys; and that to Raby was the last topic on which she felt drawn to talk to any one.

When, therefore, a neighbour suggested to her one day to give an hour or two a week to visiting the poor of the district, Raby hailed the proposal gladly. It was work she had been used to at Wildtree, and to which she had already had yearnings in London, though Mrs. Rimbolt had opposed it.

"Mind ? Not a bit," said her father, when she broached

the subject to him, "as long as you don't get small-pox or get into mischief. I should like to be a denizen of a slum myself, for the pleasure of getting a visit from you."

And so the girl began her work of charity, spending generally an hour a day, under the direction of her friend, in some of the closely packed alleys near. As she made a point of being home always to welcome her father in the afternoon, her visits were generally paid early in the day, when the men would be away at work and when the chief claimants on her help and pity would be the poor women and children left behind, with sometimes a sick or crippled man unable to help himself. It was often sad, often depressing work. But the brave girl with a heart full of love faced it gladly, and felt herself the happier for it day by day.

It was on an afternoon shortly after this new work had been begun that she was overtaken by a sudden October squall as she was hurrying back through Regent's Park towards home. The morning had been fine, and she had neither cloak nor umbrella. No cab was within sight; and there was nothing for it but to stand up under a tree till the rain stopped, or walk boldly through it. She was just debating this question with herself when she became aware of an umbrella over her, and a voice at her side saying,—

"This is most fortunate, Miss Atherton. Who would have thought of meeting you here?"

It was Scarfe; and Raby would sooner have met any one else in the world.

"Thank you," said she, "I shall be quite sheltered under this tree. Don't let me detain you."

"Nonsense!" said he; "you know I am delighted to be detained so pleasantly. Won't you come farther under the trees?"

"No, I must be home, thank you. I don't want to be late."

But just then the rain came down in such a deluge that she had nothing for it but to give in and stand up for shelter.

"It seems ages since we met," began Scarfe.

Raby had a vivid enough recollection of that evening in the conservatory, but did not contradict him.

"I called at Clarges Street last month, hoping to see you, but you were away."

"Yes, we were abroad—all but Percy."

"I saw Percy. Poor fellow, he did not seem himself at all. Miss Atherton, you must not blame me if I remind you of something we were talking about when I last saw you——"

"Please don't, Mr. Scarfe; I have no wish to refer to it."

"But I must. Do you know, Raby, I have thought of no one but you ever since?"

Raby said nothing, and wished the rain would stop.

"Is it too much to ask whether, perhaps once or twice, you have thought of me?"

Raby began to get angry. Was it not cowardly to get her here at a disadvantage and begin to talk to her about what she had no wish to hear?

"Yes—I have thought once or twice of you," she said.

"How good of you, Raby!" said he, trying to take her hand. "May I hope it was with something more than indifference—with love?"

"Certainly not," said she, drawing back her hand, and, in spite of the rain, starting to walk.

Bitterly crestfallen, he walked at her side and held his umbrella over her.

"You are harsh with me," said he reproachfully.

"I am sorry. You should not have provoked me. I asked you not to talk about it."

"I am afraid, Miss Atherton," said he, "some one has been prejudicing you against me. Percy, perhaps, has been talking about me."

Raby walked on without replying.

"Percy is very angry with me for doing what it was only my duty to do as his friend—and yours. He misunderstands me, and, I fear, so do you."

"I do not misunderstand you at all," said Raby boldly.

"But I am afraid you do not thank me."

"No. I have nothing to thank you for."

"I did my duty, at any rate. I stated the truth, and nothing more, and should have been wrong to allow things to go on without at least trying, for the sake of those for whom I cared, and still care, Miss Atherton, to set them right. Do I understand you blame me for that?"

"Mr. Scarfe, you have done a cruel thing to one who never did you harm—and I see nothing to admire in it."

Scarfe sneered.

"Jeffreys is fortunate in his champion. Perhaps, at least, Miss Atherton, you will do me the credit of remembering that on one occasion your hero owed his life to me. I hope that, too, was not cowardly or cruel."

"If he had known the ruin you had in store for him, he would not have thanked you."

Raby spoke with downcast eyes, and neither she nor Scarfe perceived the poor tramp on the path, who, as they brushed past him, glanced wistfully round at their faces.

"He never thanked me," said Scarfe.

They walked on some distance in silence. Then Scarfe said, "Miss Atherton, you are unfair to me now. You think I acted out of spite, instead of out of affection—for you."

"It is a kind of affection I don't appreciate, Mr. Scarfe; and as the rain has nearly stopped I need not trouble you any more. Thank you for the shelter, and good-bye."

"You really mean that you reject me—that you do not care for me?"

"I do not. I am sorry to say so—good-bye."

And she left him there, bewildered certainly, but in no manner of doubt that she had done with him.

She told her father all about it that evening, and was a good deal reassured by his hearty approval of her conduct.

"The kindest thing you could have done, instead of letting him dangle after you indefinitely. Rough on him, perhaps; but that sort of fellow doesn't deserve much letting down."

The reader has heard already how in the course of her visits

of mercy Raby happened to find Jonah Trimble very near his end, and how she was able to cheer and lighten his dying hours. Little dreamed she, as she sat by the death-bed that morning, and wrote those few dying words, into whose hands her little letter would fall, or what a spell they would work on the life of him who received them. From the other neighbours she heard not a little about "John," and sometimes wished she might chance to see him. But he was away from early morning till late at night, and they never met. Mrs. Pratt in the room below, and her little dying daughter, had many a tale of kindness and devotion to tell about him; and when presently the little life fled, she heard with grateful tears of his act of mercy to the poor overwrought mother, and thanked God for it.

The time passed on, and one day early in December, when she returned home, she found her father in an unwonted state of excitement.

"There's a clue, Raby, at last!" he said.

"A clue, father—you mean about young Forrester?"

"About both. It's the most mixed-up affair I was ever in. Who do you suppose has written in answer to our advertisement about Forrester?"

"Has he replied himself?' asked Raby disingenuously; for she guessed the truth.

"Not a bit of it. The letter's from Jeffreys. He doesn't sign his name, of course; but he writes to say that he was at Bolsover, and was responsible for the accident, and repeats what Rimbolt knows already about his trying to hear of them in his native place. There's nothing very fresh about Forrester; but it may lead to our finding Jeffreys."

"Of course," said Raby, finding it hard to conceal her emotion, "he has written to the lawyers. Does he give an address, then?"

"No—only a coffee-house in Drury Lane. He's evidently on his guard against a trap. He writes private and confidential; but you can see he is ready to do anything to find Forrester."

"What shall you do?"

"Well, Rimbolt says leave it to the lawyers. Of course we've no right to trap him, and Rimbolt thinks Wilkins & Wilkins had better not mention our names, but let him know they are acting for Forrester's executors. If he's not scared during the first visit or two, he may consent to see me, or Percy—and among us we may be able to help him out of his present condition, which, to judge by his letter, I should fancy is rather reduced. He has been asked to call at Wilkins' on Wednesday, and they have promised to treat the matter as confidential—and we shall just have to trust they will manage to talk him round."

CHAPTER XXVII

A Brand from the Burning

LITTLE suspecting the interest which his movements were causing elsewhere, Jeffreys, on the appointed Wednesday, presented himself at Messrs. Wilkins & Wilkins' office. He was so much changed by eight months' misery and privation that no ordinary acquaintance would have recognized in the broken-down, haggard man who entered the office the once robust and stalwart librarian of Wildtree. Even Percy would have had to look at him twice to make sure.

Mr. Wilkins looked up curiously at his visitor.

"Ah," said he, "you have called in reference to that advertisement about Gerard Forrester. Quite so. Let me see. I have your letter here, Mr. ——"

"It is not necessary to know my name," said Jeffreys.

"Just as you please. Of course, as you say you were at Bolsover School with Forrester, and were the cause of his accident, it is hardly worth while making a mystery of it."

"I forgot that. My name is John Jeffreys."

"Thank you. It is a very proper thing of you to offer to assist us in our search, and I shall be glad if in the end you should become entitled to the reward which has been offered."

"I would not touch a farthing of it," said Jeffreys, with a scorn that astonished the lawyer.

"Well, that's your affair. I can understand you have some remorse for what has occurred, and would be glad to help, reward or no reward."

"I would give my life to find young Forrester. Has anything been heard of him?"

"Not much, though we have been able to trace him rather farther than you did. We found a day or two ago a mention of the case of a lad suffering from the results of an accident such as he appears to have met with in one of the medical papers at the time. The case was reported as having been treated at Middlesex Hospital, and I find on inquiry there that in the December of that year Gerard Forrester was a patient under treatment for some months, and in the May following was discharged as incurable. That, you see, was more than eighteen months ago."

Jeffreys felt his heart thump excitedly as he listened. It was little enough, but it seemed at least to bring him six months nearer to the object of his search.

"After that," said Mr. Wilkins, "we are unable to discover anything. The address entered against his name in the hospital books, which was probably that of his old nurse, cannot now be found, as the street has been pulled down a year ago, and no one recollects him. I saw the surgeon at the hospital, who remembered the case, and he explained to me that the boy when he left there might have lived a month or twenty years. In any case he would always have to lie on his back. It would be possible, he said, for him to use his hands—indeed, he believed during the last week or two of his stay in the hospital he had amused himself with drawing."

"He was considered good at drawing at Bolsover," put in Jeffreys.

"So he may possibly have been able to earn a living of some sort. The strange thing is that he does not appear to have written to any one. He might have communicated with his former head-master, or some of his grandmother's friends at Grangerham, but he has not. According to Colonel—to my client's account, he does not even appear to have written to his father, though it is possible a letter may have miscarried there. You have heard, no doubt, that his father died in action in Afghanistan in January?"

"Yes, I heard that—very gallantly."

"Yes; in fact, the boy would, I believe, if he could be found, be entitled to a pension, besides what little property his father left. The account of the action, as well as our advertisements, have been in the papers. If Gerard is alive, he is probably somewhere beyond the reach of the press, and for my own part I cannot see how he can be in any but destitute circumstances."

This was all there was to say. But Mr. Wilkins' task was not yet done. He had been instructed to ascertain, if possible, something of Jeffreys' present condition, and to sound him as to his willingness to see again some of the friends of his old life.

"I am afraid," said he, "you too have had reverses, Mr. Jeffreys.

"Never mind me, please," replied he.

"You are living near here?"

"No."

"You must excuse me if I take an interest in you—as a former schoolfellow of young Forrester's. You have come through much since then?"

"Not more than I deserve," said Jeffreys, fidgeting.

"My client, I think, would have been glad to see you; but as you made a point of this interview being confidential, I was not justified in asking him to be present."

"Oh no. I don't want to see any one."

"It would be a great help to my client, who is a stranger in London, if you, who know Forrester, would assist him."

"Who is your client, may I ask?"

"My client," said Mr. Wilkins, resolved to make the venture, "is a Colonel Atherton, an old comrade of Captain Forrester, who has undertaken to try and find the boy and provide for him."

Jeffreys started, and replied—

"No; I will do anything to help by myself, but I do not wish to meet him."

"You know him, then?"

"No, I have never seen him."

"He would, I can promise, respect your confidence, Mr. Jeffreys."

"I know, but I cannot meet him or any one. I will do anything he wants about searching for Forrester—he cannot be more anxious about it than I am—but I have every reason for wishing to remain unknown."

"You forget that it is hardly possible he can fail to know your name; and he has friends, some of whom I believe are deeply interested in your welfare."

Jeffreys shuddered.

"I can't say more," said he. "I will do all I can, but I want to see nobody but you."

"I may, of course, report this interview to my client?"

"Of course; I can't prevent that."

"And I must tell him you definitely refuse to meet him."

"Yes. I cannot see him."

"Or tell him your address?"

"No; you know where a letter would find me."

"Well, will you call again—say this day week?"

"Yes; to see you alone."

Thus the unsatisfactory interview ended.

Mr. Wilkins was a man of honour, and felt he had no right to insist on Jeffreys opening communications with the colonel; still less had he the right as he might easily have done, to track his footsteps and discover his hiding-place.

Jeffreys, alive to a sense of insecurity, evidently expected the possibility of some such friendly ruse, for he returned to his work by a long and circuitous course which would have baffled even the cleverest of detectives. He seriously debated with himself that night the desirability of vacating his garret at Storr Alley and seeking lodgings somewhere else. His old life seemed hemming him in; and like the wary hare, he felt the inclination to double on his pursuers and give them the slip.

For, rightly or wrongly, he had convinced himself that the one calamity to be dreaded was his recapture by the friends

in whose house his bad name had played him so evil a revenge.

Yet how could he leave Storr Alley? Had he not ties there?

Was it not worth worlds to him to hear now and then, on his return at night, some scrap of news of the ministering angel whose visits cheered the place in his absence? He shrank more than ever from a chance meeting; but was it not a pardonable self-indulgence to stay where he could hear and even speak of her?

Nor was that his only tie now.

Mrs. Pratt, in the room below, had never recovered yet from the illness that had prostrated her at little Annie's death; and night by night Jeffreys had carried the two babies to his own attic in order to give her the rest she needed, and watch over them in their hours of cold and restlessness.

He became an expert nurse. He washed and dressed those two small brethren—the eldest of whom was barely three—as deftly and gently as if he had been trained to the work. And he manipulated their frugal meals, and stowed them away in his bed, with all the art of a practised nurse. How could he desert them now? How indeed? That very night, as he sat writing, with the little pair sleeping fitfully on the bed, a head was put in at the door, and a voice said in a whisper, "Poor Mrs. Pratt's gone, John."

"What," he said, "is she dead?"

"Yes—all of a sudden—the 'art done it—I know'd she was weak there. Poor dear—and her husband such a bad 'un too, and they do say she was be'ind with her rent."

So the woman chattered on, and when at last she went, Jeffreys glanced at his two unconscious charges and went on writing. No, he could not leave Storr Alley.

In the morning, as usual, he performed their little toilets, and announced to the elder that his mother was gone away, and they might stay upstairs. Whereat the little orphan was merry, and executed a caper on the bare floor.

A fresh dilemma faced the newly made father. He must work if he and his family were to eat. The thirty shillings he

had earned last week could not last for ever. Indeed, the neighbours all seemed to take it for granted he would see to Mrs. Pratt's burial; and how could he do otherwise? That meant a decided pull on his small resources. For a day or two he might live on his capital, and after that—

He put off that uncomfortable speculation. The baby began loudly to demand its morning meal; and the three-year-old, having run through its mirth, began to whimper for its mother. Altogether Jeffreys had a busy time of it.

So busy that when, about midday, Tim, who had been perched up on a box at the window to amuse himself at the peril of his neck by looking out into the court below, suddenly exclaimed—"There she is!" he bounded from his seat like one electrified, and for the first time realized that *she* might come and find him!

There was barely a chance of escape. She had already entered the house; and he became aware of the little flutter which usually pervaded the crowded tenement when she set foot in it. She had many families to visit, and each grudged her to the next. The women had yards of trouble to unroll to her sympathy; and the children besieged her for stories and songs. The sick lifted their heads as they heard her foot on the steps; and even the depraved and vicious and idle set their doors ajar to get a glimpse of her as she passed.

What could he do? Wait and face her, and perhaps meet her look of scorn, or worse still, of forgiveness? or hide from her? He debated the question till he heard her enter the chamber of death below.

Then there came over him a vision of her as he had last seen her that October afternoon with Scarfe in Regent's Park. With a groan he gathered together his papers, and bidding Tim mind the baby till he returned, seized his hat and hurried from the room. On the dark, narrow staircase he brushed against a dress which he knew must be hers. For a moment he was tempted to pause, if only for a look at her face; but she passed on, and was gone before he could turn.

He went out miserably into the street, and waited within

view of the entrance to the alley till she should come out. She was long before she appeared—he guessed how those two friendless little orphans would detain her. When she came her veil was down, and in the crowd on the pavement he lost sight of her in a moment. Yet he knew her, and all his resolution once more wavered, as he reflected that he was still within reach of her voice and her smile.

He returned anxiously to the attic. The baby lay asleep on the bed, and Tim, perched on his window seat, was crooning over a little doll.

There was a flower on the table; the scanty furniture of the room had been set in order, and his quick eye even noticed that a rent in Tim's frock which had caused him some concern in the morning had been neatly mended.

Tim came and put the little doll into his hands.

"She gave it me. Will she soon come again?" said the child.

"Yes; she's sure to come again."

"You ran away; you was afraid. I wasn't."

In a strange turmoil of emotions Jeffreys resumed his writing. The flower in the cup beside him was only a half-withered aster, yet it seemed to him to perfume the room.

After dark the neighbour put her head into the room.

"Then you didn't see the lady?" said she.

"No; I was out."

"It's a pity. She's a angel, John. The way she sat with them poor childer would do you good to see. I told 'er you 'ad took them, and, bless you, 'er eyes filled with tears to think of a man doing it when you might let them go to the work'us. Not that I wouldn't do it, John, if I 'adn't six of my own and the mangle and not room to turn round. And Mrs. Parkes was a-saying the childer would be welcome in 'er room, only the smells is that bad in 'er corner that there's no living in it except for seasoned bodies. There's my Polly, you know, John, is eight, and she would look after them now and again, when you're busy. She's a good child, is Polly, and can write on a slate beautiful."

Jeffreys thanked her, and promised to come to an arrangement with Polly, and went on with his work.

In due time the claims of hunger created a diversion, and he and his infants—one on each knee—partook of a comfortable repast of bread and milk.

He had hard work to induce the baby, after it was over, to resume his slumbers. That young gentleman evidently had a vivid recollection of some one having walked about with him and sung him to sleep in the middle of the day, and he resented now being unceremoniously laid on his back and expected to slumber without persuasion.

Jeffreys had to take him up finally and pace the room for an hour, and about ten o'clock sat down to his interrupted work. Till midnight he laboured on; then, cold and wearied, he put out his little candle and lay himself beside the children on the bed.

He had scarcely done so when he became aware of a glare at the window, which brought him to his feet in an instant. It was a fire somewhere.

His first panic that it might be in the house was quickly relieved. It was not even in Storr Alley, but in one of the courts adjoining. He looked down from his window. The alley was silent and empty. No one there, evidently, had yet had an alarm.

Quickly putting on his boots, he hurried down, and made his way in the direction of the flames. From below they were still scarcely visible, and he concluded that the fire, wherever it was, must have broken out in a top storey. Driver's Court, which backed on to Storr Alley, with which it was connected at the far end by a narrow passage, was an unknown land to Jeffreys. The Jews in Storr's had no dealings with the Samaritans in Driver's; for Storr Alley, poor as it might be, prided itself on being decent and hard-working, whereas Driver's—you should have heard the stories told about it. It was a regular thieves' college. A stranger who chanced into Driver's with a watch-chain upon him, or a chink of money in his pocket, or even a good coat on his back, might as soon

think of coming out by the way he had entered as of flying. There were ugly stories of murders and mysteries under those dark staircases, and even the police drew the line at Driver's Court, and gave it the go-by.

Jeffreys had nothing to apprehend as he rushed down the passage. He had neither watch, chain, nor money, nor good coat. His footsteps echoing noisily in the midnight silence brought a few heads to their windows, and almost before he stood in the court there was the cry of "Fire!"

Terrible anywhere, such a cry in a court like Driver's was terrible indeed. In a moment the narrow pavement swarmed with people, shouting, cursing, and screaming. Although even yet the flames scarcely appeared from below, a panic set in which it was hopeless either to remove or control. Chairs, tables, mattresses were flung, it seemed at random, from the windows. Mothers, not venturing out on the stairs, cried down to those below to catch their children. Drunken men, suddenly roused, reeled fighting and blaspheming into the court. Thieves plied their trade even on their panic-stricken neighbours, and fell to blows over the plunder. Still more terrible was the cry to others who remained within.

Children, huddled into corners, heard that cry, and it glued them where they stood. The sick and the crippled heard it, and made one last effort to rise and escape. Even the aged and bedridden, deserted by all, when they heard it, lay shouting for some one to help.

The flames, pent up at first and reddening the sky sullenly through the smoke, suddenly freed themselves and shot up in a wild sheet above the court. The crowd below answered the outburst with a hideous chorus of shrieks and yells, and surged madly towards the doomed house.

There was no gleam of pity or devotion in those lurid, upturned faces. To many of them it was a show, a spectacle; to others a terrible nightmare, to others a cruel freak of Providence, calling forth curses.

The flames, spreading downwards, had already reached the second floor, when a window suddenly opened; and a

woman with wild dishevelled hair, put out her head and screamed wildly.

The crowd caught sight of her, and answered with something like a jeer.

"It's Black Sal," some one shouted; "she's kotched it at last."

"Why don't you jump?" shouted another.

"Booh?" shouted a third. "Who skinned the cripple?"

The woman gave a scared look up and down. The flames at that moment wrapped round the window, and, with a wild howl, the crowd saw her disappear into the room.

Jeffreys all this time had been standing wedged in the crowd, a spectator of that hideous scene, and now a witness of this last tragedy.

With a desperate effort he fought his way to the front, hitting right and left to make himself a passage. It was a minute before he got through. Then the crowd, realizing as if by intuition his purpose, staggered back, and raised a howl as he dashed into the door of the half-consumed building.

The first flight of steps was still intact, and he was up it in a moment; but as he dashed up the second the smoke whirled down in his face and half choked him. He groped—for it was impossible to see—in search of the door; and guided partly by the roar of the crowd without, and partly by the shrieks within, he found the room.

It was full of flame as he entered it, and to all appearance contained nothing else. The wretched woman, finding the stairs worse to face than the window, had rushed back there and flung herself desperately on to the heads of the crowd below. As he turned to save himself, Jeffreys, amid the roar of the flames, caught the sound of a shout from the corner of the room which he had imagined to be empty.

Rushing towards it, he caught sight of a figure of a lad on the floor, blackened with smoke, and evidently unable to move.

Yet he was not senseless, for he called, "I can't walk—help me."

Jeffreys caught him in his arms in a moment, and only just in time. He had literally to wade through flame to the door; and when he reached the stairs outside, the dense smoke, reddening every instant, burst upon him well-nigh overwhelmingly.

How he struggled down that awful flight with his burden he knew not. More than once he stumbled; and once a shower of fallen embers all but stunned him. It was all done in a minute.

Those who watched without marvelled how soon he returned; and when they perceived that he bore in his arms a living creature, even Driver's Court swayed back to let him pass, and cheered him. Happily a cry of "Engines!" at the other end of the court diverted the crowd still further, and enabled him to stagger forward clear of danger.

"Drop him, he's a dead 'un!" shouted some one who stopped a moment to peer into the face of the senseless lad.

"I'll give you a shilling to help me with him out of this," said Jeffreys.

It was a shilling well spent. Unaided he could never have done it, but with the sturdy gladiator to clear the way he was able at last to reach the comparative seclusion of Storr Alley. The offer of another shilling prevailed on the man to carry the lad to the attic.

Then for the first time left to himself, he looked in the face of this unexpected guest. And as he did so the room seemed to swim round him. He forgot where he was or what he was. He looked down on an upturned face, but one not blackened with smoke. It was white and livid, with green grass for a background—and the roar he heard was no longer the distant yell of a panic-stricken mob, but boys' voices—voices shouting at himself!

Yes, for the last time that vision rose before him. Then with a mighty effort he shook off the dream and looked once more in the face of the boy who lay there on the floor of the Storr Alley garret. And as he did so young Forrester slowly opened his eyes.

CHAPTER XXVIII

Come Back

RABY had come home with a strange story from Storr Alley that afternoon. She was not much given to romance, but to her there was something pathetic about this man " John " and his unceremonious adoption of those orphan children. She had not seen anything exactly like it, and it moved both her admiration and her curiosity.

She had heard much about " John " from the neighbours, and all she had heard had been of the right sort. Jonah had talked bitterly of him now and then, but before he died he had acknowledged that John had been his only friend. Little Annie had never mentioned him without a smile brightening her face; and even those who had complaints to pour out about everybody all round could find nothing to say about him. Yet she seemed destined never to see him.

The next day, at her usual time, Raby turned her steps to Storr Alley. Groups of people stood about in the court, and it was evident, since she was last there, something untoward had happened. A fireman's helmet at the other end of the alley, in the passage leading to Driver's Court, told its own tale; and if that was not enough, the smell of fire and the bundles of rags and broken furniture which blocked up the narrow pathway, were sufficient evidence.

The exiles from Driver's stared hard at the young lady as she made her way through the crowd; but the people of Storr Alley treated her as a friend, and she had no lack of information as to the calamity of the preceding night.

Raby paid several visits on her way up. Then, with some trepidation, she knocked at the door of the garret. There was no reply from within till she turned the handle, and said—

" May I come in ? "

Then a voice replied,—

" Yes, if you like," and she entered.

It was a strange scene which met her eyes as she did so. A lad was stretched on the bed, awake, but, motionless, regarding with some anxiety a baby who slumbered, nestling close to his side. On the floor, curled up, with his face to the wall, lay a man sleeping heavily ; while Tim, divided in his interest between the stranger on the bed and the visitor at the door, stood like a little watchdog suddenly put on his guard.

" May I come in ? " said Raby again timidly.

" Here she is ! " cried Tim, running to her ; " John's asleep, and he"—pointing to the figure on the bed—" can't run about."

" Correct, Timothy," said the youth referred to ; " I can't —hullo ! "

This last exclamation was caused by his catching sight of Raby at the door. He had expected a lodger ; but what was this apparition ?

" Please come in," said he, bewildered ; " it's a shocking room to ask you into, and—Timothy, introduce me to your friend."

Raby smiled ; and how the crippled lad thought it brightened the room !

" Tim and I are friends," said she, lifting up the child to give him a kiss. " I'm afraid you are very badly hurt. I heard of the fire as I came up."

" No, I'm all right ; I'm never very active. In fact, I can only move my hands and my head, as Timothy says. I can't run, I'm a cripple. I shouldn't be anything if it wasn't for Jeff. Hullo, Jeff ! wake up, old man ! "

Raby started and turned pale as she raised her hand to prevent his waking the sleeper.

"No, please, don't wake him; what did you say his name was?"

"Jeffreys—John Jeffreys—commonly called Jeff. He hauled me out of the fire last night, and guessed as little at the time who I was as I guessed who he was. I can't believe it yet. It's like a——"

"You haven't told me your name," said Raby faintly.

"Gerard Forrester, at your service. Hullo, I say, are you ill? Hi! Jeff, wake up, old man; you're wanted."

Raby had only time to sink on a chair and draw Tim to her when Jeffreys suddenly woke and rose to his feet.

"What is it, Forrester, old fellow? anything wrong?" said he, springing to the bedside.

"I don't know what's the matter—look behind you."

* * * * *

"Why did she cry?" asked Tim presently, when she had gone. "I know; because of that ugly man," added he, pointing to Forrester.

"Excuse me, young man, I have the reputation of being good-looking; that cannot have been the reason. But, Jeff, I'm all in a dream. Who is she? and how comes she to know you or me? And, as Timothy pertinently remarks, 'Whence these tears?' Tell us all about it before the baby wakes."

Jeffreys told him. The story was the history of his life since he had left Bolsover; and it took long to tell, for he passed over nothing.

"Poor old man!" said Forrester, when it was done; what a lot you have been through!"

"Have I not deserved it? That day at Bolsover——"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, don't go back to that. You know it was an accident, and what was not an accident was the fault of my own folly. That night I awoke and saw you standing at the door, I knew that you had already suffered as much as I had."

"That was the last time I saw you. You forget I have still to hear what happened to you afterwards."

"It's pretty easily told. But I say, Jeff, what did you say her name was?"

"Raby Atherton," said Jeffreys, smiling. This was about the twentieth time the boy had broken in with some question about her. "She is the daughter of your guardian, Colonel Atherton, who was your father's comrade in Afghanistan. Some day she will tell you the story of a battle out there which will make you proud of being Captain Forrester's son. But I want to hear about you."

"I was taken home to Grangerham, you know. My grandmother was ill at the time, and just starting South, so I was left in charge of my old nurse. She was an awful brick to me, was that old soul, and I don't believe I know yet all she did and put up with for me.

"The doctors at Grangerham couldn't make anything of me. One said I'd be cutting about again in a few weeks, and another said I'd be buried in a few days. It's hard to decide when doctors disagree at that rate, and old Mary gave it up, and did what was the best thing—kept me quietly at home. Of course we thought that my grandmother had written to my father, but she hadn't, so he can't have heard for ages. We heard of my grandmother's death presently, and then made the pleasant discovery that she had died in debt, and that the furniture of the house was hired. That pulled Mary and me up short. She had saved a little, and I believe she spent every penny of that to get me up to London to a hospital. I didn't have a bad time of it there for a month or two. I was considered an interesting case, and had all sorts of distinguished fellows to come and look at me, and I lived like a fighting-cock all the time. I found, as long as I lay flat, and didn't get knocked about, I was really pretty comfortable, and what was more, I could use my hands. That was no end of a blessing. I had picked up a few ideas about drawing you know, at Bolsover, and found now that I could do pretty well at it. I believe some of my sketches at the Middlesex were thought well of. Mary came to see me nearly every day. I could see she was getting poorer and poorer, and when at last

I was discharged, the little rooms she took me to were about as poor as they could be to be respectable.

"I'd hardly been back a week, when one day after going out to try to sell some of my sketches, she came home ill and died quite suddenly. I was all up a tree then—no money, no friends, no legs. I wrote to Frampton, but he can't have got my letter. Then I got threatened with eviction, and all but left out in the street, when the person old Mary had sold my sketches to called round and ordered some more. I didn't see him, but a brute of a woman who lived in the house did, and was cute enough to see she could make a good thing out of me. So she took possession of me, and ever since then I've been a prisoner, cut off from the outside world as completely as if I had been in a dungeon, grinding out pictures by the dozen, and never seeing a farthing of what they fetched, except in the food which Black Sal provided to keep me alive. Now and then, in an amiable mood, she would get me a newspaper; and once I had to illustrate a cheap edition of Cook's *Voyages*, and of course had the book to go by. But she never let me write to anybody or see anybody, and mounted guard over me as jealously as if I had been a veritable goose that laid golden eggs.

"You know the rest. We got turned out when they pulled down the old place, and took refuge in Driver's Alley, a nice select neighbourhood; and there you found me, old man."

"Think of being near one another so long," said Jeffreys, "and never knowing it."

"Ten to one that's exactly what my guardian's daughter is observing to herself at this moment. I say, Jeff, compared with Driver's Court, this is a palatial apartment, and you are a great improvement on Black Sal; but for all that, don't you look forward to seeing a little civilization—to eating with a fork, for instance, and hearing an 'h' aspirated; and—oh, Jeff, it will be heavenly to wear a clean collar!"

Jeffreys laughed.

"Your two years' trouble haven't cast out the spirit of irreverence, youngster," said he.

"It *is* jolly to hear myself called youngster," said the boy, in a parenthesis; "it reminds me of the good old days."

"Before Bolsover?" said Jeffreys sadly.

"Look here! If you go back to that again, and pull any more of those long faces, Jeff, I'll be angry with you. Wasn't all that affair perhaps a blessing in the long run? It sent me to a school that's done me more good than Bolsover; and as for you—well, but for it you'd never have had that sweet visitor this morning."

"Don't talk of that. That is one of the chief drawbacks to my going back into civilization, as you call it."

"A very nice drawback—if it's the only one——"

"It's not—there's another."

"What is that?"

"My babies!"

It was a strange, happy night, that last in the Storr Alley garret. Jeffreys had begged Raby to let them stay where they were in peace for that day; and she considerately kept their counsel till the morning. Then she told her father the strange story.

"Two birds with one stone, and such a stone!" ejaculated the bewildered colonel.

"Four birds, father—there are two babies as well."

"Whew!" said the colonel, "what a holiday I am having!"

"Poor father," said the girl, "it's too bad!"

"Oh, well. The more the merrier. What's to be done now? We'd better charter a coach and four and a brass band and go and fetch them home in state. If they'd wait till to-morrow we would have up a triumphal arch too."

"How frivolous you are, father! We must get them away with as little fuss as possible. I arranged with Mr. Jeffreys that he would bring Mr. Forrester here in a cab this morning."

"And the babies?"

"He will go back for them afterwards."

"Well, as you like; but what about Percy and the Rimbolts?"

"Percy was to go out of town to-day, you know, and will not be back till to-morrow. By that time we shall be able to find out what Mr. Jeffreys would like best."

"Oh, very good. We'll wait till his royal highness signifies his pleasure, and meanwhile our relatives and friends must be avoided—that's what you mean."

"No," said Raby, colouring; "but you know how easily frightened he is."

The colonel laughed pleasantly.

"All right, Raby; they shall be let down as easily as you like. Now shall I be in the way when they come, or shall I make myself scarce? And, by the way, I must go at once and get a perambulator, and feeding-bottles, and all that sort of thing. How many times a day am I to be sent out to take them walks?"

"You're too silly for anything," said Raby dutifully.

She was grateful to him for making things so easy, and for covering her own ill-disguised embarrassment by this adroit show of frivolity.

There was no frivolity in the manner in which the gallant soldier welcomed his old comrade's son, when an hour later he entered the house, borne in the strong arms of his friend. A couch was ready for him, and everything was made as simple and homelike as possible. Jeffreys stayed long enough to help the boy into the civilized garments provided for him, and then quietly betook himself once more to Storr Alley.

The curiosity roused by the departure of "Black Sal's Forrester" in a cab was redoubled when, late that afternoon, Jeffreys was seen walking out of the alley with the baby in one arm and Tim holding on to the other. He had considered it best to make no public announcement of his departure. If he had, he might have found it more difficult than it was to take the important step. As it was, he had to run a gauntlet of a score of inquisitive idlers, who were by no means satisfied

with the assurance that he was going to give the children an airing.

The general opinion seemed to be that he was about to take the children to the workhouse, and a good deal of odium was worked up in consequence. Some went so far as to say he was going to sell or drown the infants; and others, Driver's Alley refugees, promised him a warm reception if he returned without them!

He neither returned with nor without them. They saw him no more. But it was given to the respectable inhabitants of a crescent near Regent's Park, about half an hour later, to witness the strange spectacle of a big young man, carrying a small baby in his arms and a big one on his shoulder—for Tim had turned restive on his hands—walk solemnly along the footpath till he reached the door of Colonel Atherton's, where he rang.

The colonel and Raby had a queer tea-party that evening. When the meal was ended, Jeffreys was called upon to put his infants to bed, and a wonderful experience to those small mortals was the warm bath and the feather bed to which they were severally introduced. Jeffreys was thankful that the baby was restless, and gave him an excuse for remaining in retirement most of the evening. At length, however, silence reigned; and he had no further excuse.

Entering the parlour, he perceived almost with a shock that Mr. Rimbolt was there. He had called in accidentally, and had just been told the news.

"My dear fellow," said he, as he took his old librarian's hand, "how we have longed for this day!"

Raby and her father were occupied with Forrester, and Jeffreys and his old employer were left undisturbed.

What they talked about I need not repeat. It chiefly had reference to Storr Alley and to Percy.

"He is down at Watford seeing a friend to-night. We expect him back to-morrow morning. How happy he will be! By the way," added Mr. Rimbolt, a moment afterwards, "now I remember, there is a train leaves Euston for

Overstone at 12.30, half an hour after Percy's train comes in. How should you like to meet him, and run down with him for a week or two to Wildtree? He sadly wants a change, and my books sadly want looking after there. You will have the place to yourselves, but perhaps you won't mind that."

Jeffreys flushed with pleasure at the proposal. It was the very programme he would have selected. But for a moment his face clouded, as he glanced towards Forrester.

"I don't know whether I ought to leave him?"

"He is with his guardian, you know, and could not be in better quarters."

"Then—you know I have—that is, you know—there are two—babies."

Raby, however, when the question was subsequently discussed, expressed herself fully equal to the care of these promising infants until a home could be found for them; and Forrester, for his part, declared that Jeffreys must and should go to Wildtree.

"Can't you see I don't want you any more?" said he. "This sofa's so comfortable, I'm certain I shall sleep a fortnight straight away, and then my guardian and I have no end of business to talk over, haven't we, guardian? and you'd really be in the way."

So it was settled. The whole party retired early to bed after their exciting day. Jeffreys slept for the last time between the babies, and could scarcely believe, when he awoke, that he was not still in Storr Alley.

Still less could Tim when he awoke realize where he was. For the John he was accustomed to stood no longer in his weather-beaten, tattered garments, but in the respectable librarian's suit which he had left behind him at Clarges Street, and which now, by some mysterious agency, found itself transferred to his present room.

Tim resented the change, and bellowed vehemently for the space of an hour, being joined at intervals by his younger brother, and egged on by the mocking laughter of young

Forrester, who was enjoying the exhibition from the adjoining chamber.

For once Jeffreys could do nothing with his disorderly infants, and was compelled finally to carry them down one under each arm, to the sitting-room, where Raby came to the rescue, and thus established her claim on their allegiance for a week or so to come.

In a strange turmoil of feelings Jeffreys at midday walked to Euston. Mr. Rimbolt was there with Percy's travelling bag and the tickets, but he did not remain till the train from Watford came in.

"I may be running down to the North myself in about a fortnight," said he, as he bade good-bye; "we can leave business till then—good-bye."

The train came in at last. Jeffreys could see the boy pacing in a nonchalant way down the platform, evidently expecting anything but this meeting.

His eyes seemed by some strange perversity even to avoid the figure which stood waiting for him; nor was it till Jeffreys quietly stepped in front of him, and said "Percy," that they took him in and blazed forth a delighted recognition.

"Jeff," he said, "you've come back—really?"

"Yes, really."

"To stay—for good?"

"For good—old fellow."

Percy heaved a sight of mighty content as he slipped his arm into that of his friend. And half an hour later the two were whizzing northwards on their way to Wildtree, with their troubles all behind them.

CHAPTER XXIX

A Fresh Start

IT is supposed to be the duty of every well-conducted author, after the curtain has fallen on the final tableau of his little drama, to lift it, or half lift it, for a momentary last glimpse at the principal actors.

I am not quite sure whether this is not an encouragement to laziness on the part of the reader. In most respects he is as well able to picture the future of Jeffreys, and Raby, and Percy, and Tim as I am.

I cannot show them to you in all the dignity of an honoured old age, because they are only a year or two older to-day than they were when Percy and Jeffreys took that little run together down to Cumberland. Nor can I show them to you, after the fashion of a fairy tale, "married and living happily ever afterwards," because when I met Jeffreys in the Strand the other day, he told me that although he had just been appointed to the control of a great public library in the North, it would still be some months, possibly a year, before he would be able to set up house on his own account.

However, he seemed contented on the whole to wait a bit; and in a long talk we had as we walked up and down the Embankment I heard a good many scraps of information which made it possible to satisfy the reader on one or two points about which he may still be anxious.

Jeffreys and Percy stayed at Wildtree for a month, and the

time was one of the happiest both of them ever spent. They did nothing exciting. They read some Aristophanes, and added some new "dodge" to their wonderful automatic book-case. They went up Wild Pike one bright winter's day and had a glorious view from the top. And on the ledge coming back they sat and rested awhile on a spot they both remembered well. Julius's grave was not forgotten when they reached the valley below; and the "J" upon the stone which marks the place to this day was their joint work for an hour that afternoon.

As for the books, Jeffreys had sprung towards them on his first arrival as a father springs towards his long-lost family. They were sadly in want of dusting and arranging, as for a month or two no one had been near them. On the floor lay the parcels, just as they had arrived from the sale in Exeter; and altogether Jeffreys had work enough to keep him busy, not for one month only, but for several. He was not sorry to be busy. For amid all the happiness and comforts of his new return to life he had many cares on his mind.

There was Forrester. He had imagined that if he could only find him, all would be right, the past would be cancelled and his bad name would never again trouble him. But as he thought of the helpless cripple, lying there unable to move without assistance, with all his prospects blighted and his very life a burden to him, he began to realize that the past was not cancelled, that he had a life's debt yet to pay, and a life's wrong for which, as far as possible, to make amends. But he bravely faced his duty. Forrester's letters, which came frequently, certainly did not much encourage melancholy reflections.

"I'm in clover here," the boy wrote about a week after Jeffreys had gone North. "One would think I'd done something awfully fine. My guardian is a trump—and is ever tired of telling me about my father. Do you know I'm to have a pension from a grateful country? What wouldn't Black Sal say to get hold of me now? What I value quite as much is his sword, which I keep by my couch

like a Knight Templar. So mind what you're up to when you come back.

"Here am I writing about myself, when I know you are longing to hear about (turn over-leaf and hide your blushes)—the babies! They are tip-top. Timothy, ever since I got my sword, has shown great respect for me, and sits on the pillow while I sketch. By the way, do you recognize enclosed portrait? It's my first attempt at a face—rather a pleasant face too, eh? Oh, about the babies. The young 'un's cut a tooth. The whole house has been agitated in consequence, and the colonel is as proud as if he'd captured a province. So are we all. They are to go to an orphanage, I believe, in a week or two; but not till you come back and give your parental benediction. My guardian is going to write you all about it. He promises military openings for both when they arrive at the proper age; and Tim is practising already on a drum which *she* has given him.

"She, by the way, never mentions you, which is an excellent sign, but rather rough on me when I want to talk about you. She occasionally is drawn out to talk about a certain Mr. John at Storr Alley; but, as you know, she only knew about him from hearsay. How's that boy who has got hold of you down in Cumberland? Are he and I to be friends or enemies? Tell him I'm game for either, and give him choice of weapons if the latter. But as long as he lets me see you now and then and treats you well, we may as well be friends. I'm flourishing and awfully in love. Stay away as long as you can; you're not wanted here. The lady of Clarges Street came to see me yesterday. She sent you really a kind message; so even in that quarter you may yet look for a friend. Good-bye—remember me to that chap. Tim sends his duty; and *she* when I mentioned I was writing to you and asked if there was any message, did not hear what I said.—G. F."

There was plenty in this bright letter to give comfort to Jeffreys. He rejoiced humbly in its affectionate tone towards himself. He treasured the portrait. He was gratified at

the unenvious references to Percy, and he was relieved at the prospect before his babies.

The part that referred to Raby left him less room for jubilation. Forrester evidently thought, as Percy did, that in that quarter everything was plain sailing. They neither of them realized the gulf between the two, and they neither of them knew of that miserable October afternoon in Regent's Park. Forrester's jocular reference to Raby's silence and reserve seemed to Jeffreys but a confirmation of what he believed to be the truth.

He was to her what any other friend in distress might be, an object of sweet pity and solicitude. But that was all. He had a bad name, and much as she would brave for him to help him, she did not—how could she?—love him.

At the end of a month Mr. Rimbolt wrote to say he was coming down to Wildtree, and would be glad if Percy and Jeffreys would meet him with the carriage at Overstone.

They did so, and found that he was not alone. Mr. Halgrove stepped pleasantly out of the train at the same time and greeted his quondam ward with characteristic ease.

"Ah, Jeffreys—here we are again. I'm always meeting you at odd places. How fresh everything looks after the rain!"

"Mr. Halgrove is my brother-in-law, you know, Jeffreys," said Mr. Rimbolt, in response to his librarian's blank look of consternation. "I brought him down, as he wanted to see you and have a talk. If you two would like to walk," added he, "Percy and I will drive on, and have dinner ready by the time you arrive."

"Good-hearted fellow, Rimbolt," said Mr. Halgrove, as they started to walk, "he always was. That's Wild Pike, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Jeffreys, greatly puzzled at this unexpected meeting.

"Yes, Rimbolt's a good fellow; and doesn't mind telling bad fellows that they aren't. You'll smile, Jeffreys; but he has actually made me uncomfortable sometimes."

" Really ? " said Jeffreys, thinking it must have been some very remarkable effort which succeeded in accomplishing that wonder.

" Yes. I told him once casually about an unpleasant ward I once had, whom I rather disliked. I thought he would sympathize with me when I related how delicately I had got rid of him and sent him adrift when it did not suit me to keep him any longer. Would you believe it, Rimbolt wasn't at all sympathetic, but asked what had become of my ward's money! Do take warning, Jeffreys, and avoid the bad habit of asking inconvenient questions. You have no idea of the pain they may cause. Mr. Rimbolt's question pained me excessively. Because my ward's money, like himself, had gone to the bad. That would not have been of much consequence, were it not that I was responsible for its going to the bad. It was most inconvenient altogether, I assure you. It made me feel as if I had behaved not quite well in the matter; and you know how depressing such a feeling would be. Still more inconvenient at the time when I had this talk with Rimbolt about six months ago, I had just come back from America with my finances in not at all a flourishing condition, so that if even I had been disposed to refund my ward, I could not have done it. Happily he was lost. It was an immense relief to me, I can assure you.

" Two months ago my finances looked up. I had news that some of my Yankee speculations were turning out well, and I unexpectedly found myself a man of means again. Rimbolt, who certainly has the knack of making ill-timed suggestions, proposed that that would be a good opportunity for making good what properly belonged to my ward. I urged in vain that my ward was lost, and that the money properly belonged to me as a reward for the trouble I had had in the matter. He actually insisted that I should desposit with him, as trustee for my ward, the full amount of what belonged to him, with interest added to date, promising if by any unfortunate accident the fellow should be found, to see it came into his hands. One's obliged to humour Rimbolt,

so I did what he wanted, and that's how it stands. If ever this unprofitable ward turns up, he'd better keep his eye on Rimbolt.

"There, you see, Jeffreys, that's just a little anecdote to show you how easy it is, by being inconsiderate, for one person to make another uncomfortable. But now tell me how you like Cumberland. You must be quite a mountaineer by this time."

Jeffreys admitted he was pretty good, and had the tact to suit his humour to that of his guardian, and not refer further to the lost ward or his money.

Mr. Halgrove stayed two days, and then departed for the Great West, where it is possible he may to-day carry a lighter heart about with him for his latest act of reparation.

Before the trio at Wildtree returned to London, Jeffreys, greatly to Percy's terror, asked leave to go for two days to York. The boy seemed still not quite sure that he had got back his friend for good, and highly disapproved now of putting the temptation to "bolt again," as he called it, in his way. However, Jeffreys "entered into recognisances" to come back, and even offered to take Percy with him on his journey. The offer was not accepted, for Percy knew Jeffreys would sooner go alone. But it allayed the boy's uneasiness.

Jeffreys had much trouble to discover Mrs. Trimble. Galloway House was still an educational establishment, but its present conductor knew nothing of the lady whose "goodwill and connection" he had purchased so cheaply two years ago.

Finally Jeffreys decided to call at Ash Cottage. The walk up that familiar lane recalled many a strange memory. The bank whereon he had sat that eventful early morning was unchanged, and had lost all traces of Jonah's excavations. The railway embankment he had half thought of helping to construct was already overgrown with grass, and thundered under the weight of trains every few minutes

Ash Cottage had not changed a plank or a tile since he last saw it. There were the same cracks in the wall of the shed, the same bushes on either side of the gate—nay, he was sure those wisps of hay clinging to the branches of the holly had been there two years ago.

As he walked somewhat doubtfully towards the house—for he could hardly forget under what circumstances he had last seen Farmer Rosher—he heard a boy's shout behind him, and looking round, perceived Freddy and Teddy giving chase.

"It *is* Jeff!" shouted Freddy. "I knew him a mile away."

"I saw him first. We knew you'd come back, Jeff; huzzah!"

"That tricycle wants looking to awful bad. Our feet touch the ground on it now, Jeff."

"Come on to the shed, I say, and put it right. *How* brickish of you to come back, Jeff!"

A long afternoon the happy Jeff spent over that intractable tricycle. It was past all repair; but no feat of engineering was ever applauded as were the one or two touches by which he contrived to make it stand upright and bear the weight of a boy. Before the work was over Farmer Rosher had joined them, well pleased at his boys' delight.

"Thee's paid oop for thy sin, lad," said he. "I did thee and the lads more harm than I meant; but thee's a home here whenever thee likes, to make up for it; and come away and see the missus and have a drop of tea."

From the farmer, who may have had good reason for knowing, Jeffreys learned that Mrs. Trimble was comfortably quartered in an almshouse; and there, next morning—for there was no escaping from Ash Cottage that night—he found her, and soothed her with the news he had to tell of her poor prodigal.

"Well, well," she said, "God is merciful; and He will reward you, John, as He had pity on the lad. And now will you be sure and take a mother's blessing to the sweet lady, and tell her if she ever wants to make an old woman happy, she

has only to come here, and let me see her and kiss her for what she has done for me and mine?"

That message he delivered a week later as he walked with Raby one afternoon in Regent's Park. It was not exactly a chance walk. They had both been up to the orphanage at Hampstead with the reluctant Tim and his brother, to leave them there in good motherly hands till the troubles of infancy should be safely passed.

It was Tim who had insisted on having the escort of both his natural guardians on the occasion; and at such a time and on such an errand Tim's word was law. So they had gone all four in a cab, and now Raby and Jeffreys returned, and with a sense of bereavement, through the Park.

"I will certainly go and see Mrs. Trimble when next I am North," said Raby, "though I wish I deserved half her gratitude."

"You deserve it all. You were an angel of light to that poor fellow."

They walked on some way in silence. Then she said—

"Storr Alley is so different now, Mr. Jeffreys. A family of seven is in your garret. You would hardly know the place."

"It would be strange indeed if I did not, for I too saw light there."

"How wonderful it all was!" said Raby.

"When Jonah was telling me about his good protector, John, how little I dreamed it was you!"

"And when you wrote this little letter," said he, showing her the precious scrap of paper, "how little you dreamed who would bless you for it!"

"The blessing belonged, did it not, to Him Who has been leading us all, in mercy, in His own way?"

Again they walked in silence.

Was it accident, or what, which brought them, without knowing it, to a spot which to each was full of painful memories?"

Raby was the first to stop abruptly.

"Let us go another way, Mr. Jeffreys, if you don't mind. I don't like this avenue."

"No more do I," said Jeffreys, who had stopped too.

"Why?" she asked.

"Need I say?"

"Not if you don't like."

"I have not walked down here since an afternoon last October. There was a sudden storm of rain——"

"What! Were you here then?"

"I was. You did not see me."

"You saw me then. I was with Mr. Scarfe."

"Yes. You were——"

"Miserable and angry," said she, her face kindling at the recollection.

He darted one glance at her, as brief as that he had darted on the afternoon of which they spoke.

Then, he had read nothing but despair for himself; now, though her eyes were downcast and her voice angry, he thought he read hope.

"Suppose," said he, in a little while, "instead of running away from the path, we just walk down it together. Would you mind? Are you afraid?"

"No," she said, smiling. And they walked on.

THE END.